THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 1988
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The Wasp

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH's
Suspect

JANWILLEM van de WETERING's
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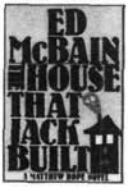

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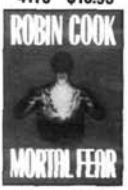

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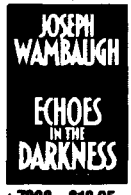

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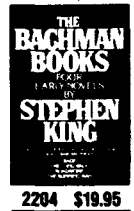

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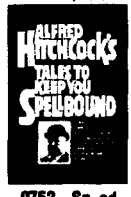

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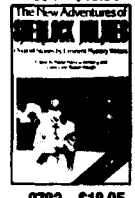

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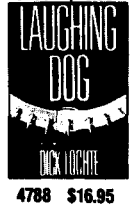

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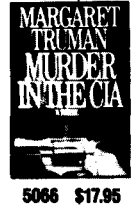

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

At first Neil and Louise had bought the French property in order to spend their summers there, but because of a knee injury Neil couldn't get around as easily on foreign assignment as he used to—or so his newspaper thought—and so they subleased the London flat and moved to Trois Chataigniers.

A story wonderfully evocative of the French farm country—you can almost smell the chestnuts—by world-class author Patricia Highsmith, about whom Julian Symons wrote in Mortal Consequences: *"Without being directly concerned with politics, Highsmith implicitly suggests that in a society where most people are imprisoned within the mechanisms of organizations, social groups, or families, criminals are potentially free . . ."*

SUSPECT

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

I might call this story "How I Lost My French House"—or how I and my wife did—but that sounds facetious and the story is not funny.

Louise and I had owned our one-storey farmhouse and our modest amount of land for fourteen years by the time the trouble occurred. At the beginning, we had lived nine or ten months of the year in London in a roomy old flat off Sloane Square which we still possess. We had bought Trois Chataigniers, as we called our French property, done the house up in our spare time, created a garden, and spent our summers there. I am a semiretired journalist, fifty-nine now, and because of a knee injury incurred in a small-plane accident in the Chad a few years ago, I can't get around as easily on foreign assignments as I used to—or so my newspaper thinks—so we sub-

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leased the London flat and moved to Trois Chataigniers. I am on a reduced salary, I do some free-lance writing also, and my wife translates for French book and magazine publishers, so we make ends meet, and nicely. And with the country life there, I had the leisure and scenery for my second passion, painting. There were haystacks, barns, old houses with dusty orange-tile roofs, cows lying in fields when it was about to rain.

But to the point. I was, I am to this day, suspected of having committed a murder. Not officially, mind you, but unofficially by people in the neighborhood there. Villagers look at you in a different way if they think you've killed someone or might have killed someone. It's pretty awful, and I simply couldn't stand it any longer. I'd even begun to have dreams that I did what the neighbors believed or pretended to believe that I did. My wife is French-born and understands the language better than I ever will, and she says the remarks were not as bad as I imagined.

It began so innocently, like a landscape by Millet or Corot, literally. I was painting a still-life in my workroom and glanced for a second out my window, as I do a dozen times a day. The view was of a broad field devoted to grain or leeks or cabbage, depending on the season. In the distance straight beyond my window, I could see the house of the Germain family, who owned that field and more fields on the other side of their house. Once in a while I saw Georges Germain or one of his two grown sons bending, hoeing, or some such many yards away. Georges and his wife and sons and one younger daughter tended the farm.

On this afternoon in August when I glanced out, I saw a hundred yards or so from me a young woman in a shirt and bluejeans working in the field, bending from side to side as she snatched weeds from between rows of young cabbage. Her figure held my attention before I realized why: she was working too fast, not at all in the manner of an experienced farm man or woman who knows he or she has hours of such ahead and that to work rapidly is foolhardy. Not a girl from the country, I thought. (But I was wrong.)

As she came nearer, hands darting, I could see that she had darkish blonde hair and a handsome, strong-featured face. She leapt one row, then another, and began weeding her way back toward the Germain house.

Louise had been shopping in Chipac, our nearest village, that afternoon, and said to me on her return, "Big news, Neil! The older

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Germain boy's getting married! I had a coffee in the bistro and Georges was there treating a couple of chums to drinks. He wants us to come over this evening."

"Really? To their house?" We weren't in the habit of socializing with the Germains, we'd been in their house perhaps twice.

"For a glass of wine. To be neighborly, you know? I gather before dinner."

It was then after six, about the time for Louise's and my kir or gin-and-tonic, but we tugged on green rubber boots in case the road between us and the Germain house was muddy, and walked over. I supposed I'd have to drink rawish armagnac, which I didn't much care for, and, worse, I couldn't understand more than half of what they were saying. Even Louise could get lost sometimes in their dialect and accent.

We all stood or sat on straight chairs in the big kitchen with the red-brick floor. Skinny Jules Germain, who was about twenty-two, seemed in a state of controlled elation, and wore pale-blue-cotton trousers with a belt and a white shirt instead of his usual blue work gear. Two husky men were deep in their wine and rather shouted conversation at the central wooden table, and Marie, wife of Georges, resumed her work at the sink after greeting us. Then a girl came through a doorway, and I recognized the blonde girl I'd seen working away two hours earlier. Her name was Marie-Camille, someone said. Jules' pinched little face lit up with pride, and he stood taller.

I made a slight bow as I was presented to Marie-Camille. She inspired it. Besides being almost beautiful, she looked intelligent. Still, she must be a simple girl, I thought, to be marrying Jules Germain, who had probably left school at sixteen and not opened a book since.

"Are you from Cahors, mad'moiselle? Or the vicinity here?" I ventured to ask Marie-Camille.

She lifted her bluish-grey eyes to mine, smiled slightly, and replied something which I couldn't completely understand—and, anyway, the last part of it was drowned in a roar of laughter from the two at the wooden table.

I expressed my congratulations and good wishes to Jules, said the same to Mme. Germain and her husband, and then we departed.

"Nice-looking girl, isn't she?" Louise said as we were walking homeward.

"Isn't she indeed!" I replied.

Louise informed me that one of the men at the table was Marie-

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Camille's father and that her mother was the woman in the blue dress, whom I hadn't noticed, and that the wedding was to take place in four days, on Sunday. The girl's family came from a village on the other side of Cahors.

I often wake around six in the morning and can't get back to sleep easily, especially in summer when it's light, so I slip out of bed, dress, and take a walk. The awful morning was two days after we'd met Jules' bride-to-be. I walked my usual way straight from our back door through the garden, then onto a path beside a little trench that looks from a distance as if it might be a brook's bed but which is manmade. The trench is a boundary for property that did not belong to us, and the path along it is an informal lane for walkers or small wagons and leads to a wider unpaved road which can take you to Chipac. From this path, I could see two or three distant farmhouses, ignore a faraway dog's bark, if my boot happened to break a twig, and inhale the fresh morning air. I think it was a bird that caught my eye and made me look to my right across the little dry trench. What I saw brought me to a halt.

A female figure lay sprawled face down, left arm extended upward, on the opposite bank of the shallow depression. The fair hair and the youth of the figure made her identity unmistakable: it was Marie-Camille. I saw some dark blood at the back of her head.

I sensed that her body—there was a definite deadness about it—had been there for many hours. I took one or two steps toward her, close enough to see that a longish lock of hair was embedded in the soil as if by somebody's step. Her dark-green skirt and white blouse were both slightly soiled with earth smudges. One of her black slippers was missing, leaving one foot quite bare. Get home and ring the police, I remember thinking as I turned and climbed the little slope.

Suddenly I was aware of a figure standing to my left, on the other side of the trench—Jules Germain, scowling at me, hands rammed into the pockets of his blue work jacket. There was no doubt that he had seen the girl's body, too, because it was in plain view from where he stood.

"What *happened,* Jules?" I asked. *"Vous allez signaler ceci?* Are you going to report this?" I waited for an answer, but Jules might have been paralyzed and struck dumb. *"I'm* going to report it," I said, and went off. After a few paces, I turned and saw him standing

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where he had been, but not looking at me now. I hurried on toward home.

Louise was up, and I told her what I had seen. Horrified, she went at once to the telephone. I listened to her repeating in French exactly what I had told her.

"The police are coming immediately," she said. "To the Germain house first, I think." A bit pale, she went into the kitchen and put the gas fire on low under the coffeepot. "Do you mean Jules didn't say one word to you?"

"That's right. Maybe he was in shock. Maybe he'd just discovered her, too." But somehow I didn't believe that.

We peered out the kitchen window as a police car rolled up to the Germain house.

Jules Germain said a great deal to the police, it seemed, because the police didn't arrive at Trois Chataigniers until after I'd finished a mug of coffee and some bread and cheese. Names, citizenship, places of birth were all noted from our passports and *Permis de Sejour* before anything else was said. The police were there, and the two who spoke most had the local accent but one of the two made an effort to speak understandably to me. What he said was that Jules Germain had told them he was sure I had murdered Marie-Camille (I couldn't get her last name) because I was attracted to her, and because I was jealous of Jules, and so on and so on. Was this true? the officer asked.

"No. That's absolutely absurd," I replied.

"The young man's upset," said Louise calmly. "You will find that there are no grounds for a suspicion like that."

"Jules Germain says that you met the girl a few days ago and that—"

"That's true," I said.

"And that you have been prowling around the house there, taking walks, watching for her—"

Louise and I, still keeping our calm, enlightened the officers. I worked in my atelier in the morning and afternoon (we showed them the room, with typewriter and easel), my wife and I always had dinner and spent the evening together, and I took a walk *some* mornings (not yesterday, for instance) along the path where I had walked this morning and had caught sight of the girl's corpse. They wanted my shoe size, also fingerprints. Much measurement. I co-operated gladly.

The three officers stayed nearly an hour, and politely declined a

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coffee or *un petit rouge,* which I took as a bad sign. I finally gave them a photostat of my curriculum vitae, which was three years old, rather than try to answer some of their questions.

"What do you make of all *that,* now?" I asked my wife when we were alone. I gave a short laugh.

Strong sunlight now poured through the living-room window, and her straight brown hair, pulled back in a bun, had a lovely sheen. "I'm wondering what *else* Jules said. And why."

Her reply made a chill go up my spine. I had expected her to say something reassuring. The thought that Jules might be piling it on to make me suspected of the girl's murder strengthened an idea that I already had. "You're wondering why. You mean, unless he did it himself."

"Well—yes."

"But if so, isn't it funny he'd go back to the—you know? The police said that the girl had been dead at least twenty-four hours. You heard them."

"Yes, I did. —Why on earth would Jules want to kill the girl he was going to marry?"

That stumped us both.

"Since Jules is accusing me, I think I can imagine why he was on the scene there," I went on. "He probably knows that I walk along that path some mornings. I think he was lying flat in the grass on the other side of the ditch and didn't stand up till I was very near the girl—till I'd *seen* her, really."

"You should've said that to the police, Neil!"

"That he must've been lying flat? I thought it might sound as if I were trying hard to attack Jules, don't you think?" At once I saw my illogic. Jules had already attacked me, and hard.

"No, Neil, I think it's important. I know that land there. Of course he was lying flat on the ground or you would have seen him from a distance. It was already light, you said. Wasn't it?"

"Oh, definitely. Light enough to see a standing figure. Yes—Jules saw me first, that's for sure."

"I'm going to tell the police now," said Louise, and picked up the telephone. She dialed the police at the number we'd written on the telephone book's cover for handy reference. The policemen concerned with the Germain affair hadn't returned, but even as Louise spoke they arrived and she was able to talk with one of them.

"After you and your colleagues left," Louise said in her precise French, "my husband told me that Jules Germain must have been

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lying down in the grass until my husband was very near him and caught sight of the girl's body. Otherwise my husband would have seen him at once because the land is flat and it was light enough. My husband and I find it strange that Jules Germain should be lying in the damp grass at six in the morning and stand up just when my husband— I'm glad you see my point, that it is important!" There was a pause, then Louise asked, "But when did Jules say he had found the girl—at what time? —Oh. Yes, of course I understand."

The police, said Louise when she hung up, regretted to say they were not permitted to tell the details of Jules Germain's statements to them, such as when he said he had discovered the girl's body.

Louise and I drove into Chipac around four that afternoon, I to pick up a couple of writing tablets and a newspaper, and Louise to buy some groceries. I noticed that the villagers' glances at me lingered longer than usual and that their "Bon soirs" were a bit muted. No smiles.

Louise had news when we got back into the car for the three-kilometer drive home. In the butcher's shop, Mme. Beranger had been whispering with two other women, plainly wanting Louise to overhear what she had to impart, Louise being on good terms with Mme. Beranger, so Louise had joined them. And learned that Marie-Camille had been at least two months' pregnant.

"Pregnant? —By Jules?"

"Not by Jules," said Louise. "That's what everyone thinks. If by Jules, it wouldn't have been so—*bouleversant,* I suppose. Mme. Beranger thinks that Jules could have had a nasty shock and been in a fury with the girl. One of the women, Monique Corbert, had been over to see the Germains and she heard from them that you'd seen—what happened and that we reported it to the police."

"And did she know that Jules had been right there, too? On the scene?"

"No—no mention of that. And I thought I should not say it right there to three or four women," Louise said in the emphatic way she has when she believes a position she has taken is the right one. "I thought it might sound—defensive on our part. Let's let the police do the rest."

"Oh, indeed!" I was driving and keeping my eyes on the road. "Do you think the story's true? That the girl was pregnant? Who would've spilled beans like *that?"*

Louise reflected. "The police are local men—they might talk to

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their chums. And there was an autopsy today, Madame Beranger said. The police must have spoken with the girl's parents, looking for a suspect besides Jules, don't you think? And they'd ask, no doubt, if Jules knew the girl was pregnant."

"And I wonder what Jules answered," I mused. The picture was taking on a design, a composition. "The girl can't or doesn't want to marry the man who got her pregnant, needs to marry soon, and hits upon Jules. She *was* pretty—probably could have got almost anyone she wanted, don't you think?—then Jules discovers that she's pregnant and kills her in a fit of temper. Something like that?"

"Um. Possibly, yes."

"But, Louise—when we saw Jules the other night and met the girl, would you have thought he knew then she was pregnant? I don't think he *did*. He looked proud as could be, didn't you think?"

"True, Neil. I do."

Then we both wondered aloud how and when Jules had found out the girl was *enceinte*. Or was Jules the happy father-to-be, and someone else had murdered the girl? Or had Marie-Camille "confessed" her state to Jules either later the evening we met her, or early the next day? Louise and I agreed that it might not take long for the police to track down the man who had had the affair with Marie-Camille (assuming that her lover had not been Jules), since she came from a small village, eliminate him or not from suspicion, and that this might leave only Jules as suspect.

Alas, life is not so simple. Or life in a French village is not. The lover of Marie-Camille was identified, thanks to information from her parents, and found to have been several hundred kilometers away in Rouen during the forty-eight-hour period when the murder must have taken place. (He was a salesman with appointments he had kept, it was confirmed.) The Germain family admitted—reluctantly, it seemed, judging from the account my wife heard from an acquaintance in Chipac—that they had known the girl was pregnant and that it had not mattered to Jules or to them. Marie-Camille had been moody, the Germains said, had taken walks early and late, and who knows what assailant she had encountered in the empty field there? (At least the Germains hadn't pointed the finger straight at me in this conversation.)

I was curious about unanswered or unput questions. For instance, where was Jules' bedroom in the Germain house, and what was its view? Could Jules have slipped out and followed the girl on one of her late or early walks? Or simply gone with her for a walk? Exactly

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when had Jules and the Germain family learned that the girl was pregnant? My wife and I felt that we should not ask these questions ourselves but go about life as usual. The police had telephoned the day after the discovery of Marie-Camille's murder to ask if I was going to be home for the next week or so, and I replied that I intended to be home for the next many months. The police officer, whose name was Bertrand Dupont, said he would probably ring again soon and visit me to ask some more questions.

A few days went by. I began and finished a portrait of Louise, asking her to sit for as short a period each time as I could and still make progress. I did it quickly, therefore, and maybe that was all to the good. I was pleased with the canvas and so was Louise.

The police after more than two weeks had not telephoned, and I supposed they had no questions for me. But what I suffered, in the whole village of Chipac, was suspicion. The newspapers had mentioned my name, Neil McAllister, only once that I knew of—as "the finder" of the girl's corpse on such and such a date, when I had gone home at once to tell my wife, who had telephoned the Chipac police. It had never been stated in the local newspaper, meaning that of Cahors, that Jules Germain had been standing only some four meters from the girl's body when I looked up just seconds after spotting her. I tried to explain this to myself as the police withholding possibly incriminating evidence until all the facts could be gathered, but I found this difficult to do as time went on.

The townspeople were sticking by Jules, and seemed collectively to have decided to suspect an outsider: me. Louise reported some remarks that she had overheard, whereas I sensed them on the ever rarer occasions when I went into Chipac. Never had I felt more thankful, however, for my greying hair and thickening waistline, even my slight limp. Did I look like a silly fellow who'd attempt to pay court to a twenty-year-old, the betrothed of a next-door neighbor to boot? But neither I nor Louise could come out and ask this question of the butcher, the baker, or the greengrocer in Chipac.

The glances and the remarks behind my back (or so I fancied) began to gnaw at me. When I fished coins from my pocket to pay for my newspaper, I imagined that the balding man behind the counter and the person or persons near me waiting their turn to pay for something looked at my hands, thinking: those hands killed a young woman. Did the locals think I had enticed the girl for a walk and grabbed a rock and broken her skull when she said no to my ad-

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vances? That was certainly the only picture I could conjure up, though of course there could have been a few variations of the same. I had one dream in which Marie-Camille turned to me beside the ditch and said, "No," smiling at me at the same time. "Of course, no," I replied in the dream. I had no rock in my hand. The girl was pretty in the dream, yes, as she had been pretty in life, but in the dream I had no desire to embrace her or to come any closer to her. She was simply a handsome girl.

"Unbelievable," I said to my wife, "the police just shrugging off the fact that Jules was standing there when I found the girl!"

It might have been the third time I'd said this to Louise. I knew by now that Jules had told the police he had found Marie-Camille just a few minutes before I came on the scene, that he had felt faint at the sight and had lain down in the grass. He'd said that he and his family had been looking for her the afternoon of the preceding day and had telephoned her parents, thinking she might have made her way home somehow. Marie-Camille's parents had returned to the town where they lived the morning after Louise and I had attended the 6:00 P.M. wine party at the Germains', and the girl had been supposed to go with them, but she had been "off on one of her walks," the Germains said: she had come back, then gone off once more, and after that the Germains had not seen her again. She had to come back, I thought sarcastically to myself, to give me time to prowl around the house at least once in order to ogle her.

"Well—you know Jules' story, Neil," Louise said with typical patience, but I heard contempt in her tone.

Yes, I knew Jules' story. And Jules was not charged. It was as if the police thought, Yes, Jules Germain probably killed her in a fit of rage, *un crime passionnel,* natural under the circumstances—but he is a young man and his family an old one here, and the girl perhaps had not been quite honest with him. So we'll let suspicion grow round a stranger who is not one of us, though we won't go so far as to accuse him. In time, Jules Germain will find another girl for a wife and live this story down, for he is going to inherit the land there.

There is more than one way to destroy a life. I tried for a month, then another month, to shrug off the glances and stares. No one said a hostile word, but no one said a sympathetic or friendly word, either. (I conceded that this might be because I'd never been outgoing to *them,* chatting with them in the one bistro and all that, and because

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my French was known to be limited.) I felt that the shunning extended even to Cahors, forty kilometers away. My photograph hadn't been in the papers, but somehow I felt that the pharmacist there looked at me in a new, guarded way and conducted his business with me coldly when I purchased a couple of bottles of vitamins.

Or was I becoming paranoid? Quite possibly. Best to admit it and face it, if so. Better yet to face the fact that I thought I couldn't stand the atmosphere of Chipac, even of our own beloved house, any longer. Louise understood when I told her this. She didn't think the suspicion would ever really blow over, and neither did I.

I take it back that I didn't get a single friendly word, because Mme. Cordier, librarian at the little Bibliotheque Publique of Chipac, gave me a really warm *"Bon jour!"* one day when we encountered each other at the newspaper vendor's. "I feel sure all these stories will disappear, Monsieur McAllister!" she added with utmost conviction. "Because they are *absurd!*" I thanked her and said I hoped she was correct. Over the years I had donated books in English, paperbacks and review copies, to the library and my wife had given many French books, too. But this didn't count for as much as if I'd been a noisy good fellow Sunday noon in the Centre Bar in that hour or so before the menfolk went home for the big midday meal. In fact, later I felt a bit depressed at the thought that someone like Mme. Cordier had taken the rumors seriously enough to commiserate with me in such an earnest way.

Meanwhile, Jules Germain was either working in the fields on the other side of the Germain house or he had gone away for a while. Neither I nor Louise ever glimpsed him in Chipac.

I took it as a bad sign that the police did not telephone or send any notice for me to come and see them.

"They're content with the way things are," I said to Louise. "The blame is slowly sliding onto me. Very convenient."

"Oh, Neil!" Louise didn't like it when I sounded bitter.

"It is nearly three months now," I went on, "and they haven't found the person who did it. And they're not looking, are they?"

That not even Louise could deny. A friend of hers had rung up the police on her own a few days earlier to ask about progress in the Marie-Camille case and reported to Louise that she had got a vague and unsatisfactory answer. They were doing what they could, but there was nothing new to report. I was ashamed of the bitterness

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in myself, because it hurt my wife and made me somehow small and unmanly.

Still, we both knew that the atmosphere of doubt and suspicion wasn't going to lift and that I would go on encountering it in Chipac, even from our other nearest neighbor, the reddish-haired farmer who had the house a kilometer farther down the straight path where I'd found Marie-Camille's body. His house was not within sight, as was that of the Germains, but he was *there*, suspecting me every bit as much as—well, the rest pretended to suspect me. Awful to realize that all of them, every man and woman, must know that I was innocent, otherwise the police would have had me behind bars by now.

So Louise and I put Trois Chataigniers on the market, and with the greatest regret. We took the car and cruised farther south, looking for another pleasant spot, another house which we might with effort and love do up as we'd done up Trois Chataigniers.

We did find such a place in Var, where it was warmer and drier, a house we were rather pleased with and which would not cost a fortune to make comfortable. But fourteen years in Trois Chataigniers, that many years in any house with a garden—one comes to love the garden more than the stones or wood of the house, and when one says goodbye it is like saying goodbye to something alive which cannot understand, like a dog or a cat.

Yes, why?

Because the discomfort of being suspected is just as bad, or so it seems to me to be, as the guilt I might feel if I *had* killed Marie-Camille, though in the first case the emotion is resentment and in the second case the emotion would have been shame. Guilt is, of course, what the village people wanted me to feel, though they wouldn't put it in such plain words. The fact that we moved away will help them to justify what they are collectively trying to feel or pretending to feel: disgust with me. Blame for murder has to fall somewhere, and they don't want it on Jules Germain's head. The fact that we abandoned our house and garden will strengthen their suspicion and make it conviction, in two senses of the word.

The question is, can I ever escape this living bad dream and get back to normal? I intend to try.

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a *NEW* Neil Hockaday story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

Letting Davy Mogaill out of Central Lock-Up, the sergeant warned Hock: "He gets to leave because he's got some half-assed alibi that's got great legs on her but not the kind that stands up in court later on. But the lawyer tells me we treat him like any other suspected perp and so out he goes. Lieutenant Mogaill is now officially on your head. That understood?"

Perfectly, said Hock . . .

THE TRESPASS

by THOMAS ADCOCK

When murder is a lifetime in the creation, the killer is more fatally wounded than the victim. In so many of these instances, the dearly despatched dies a roundly unmourned death. But always, the survivor left holding the smoking gun or bloodied knife or throat-warmed rope begins the sufferance of a long delirium of sorrow—with the added regret that nothing, really, has been settled after all.

These finer, nastier points in so much of the business of homicide are not to be found in the press. Journalists are no better equipped to trouble themselves with the mess of the whole and lengthy truth of life and death than are their readers. And so there's poetry and fiction when observable facts cannot begin to explain away the troubles with our human nature.

I'm not a man to begrudge anyone the warmth of the uncomplicated view. Sometimes I wish that I, too, could simply trust in what I can see and hear. Sometimes I wish I wasn't a cop.

But in my time I've hunted down many murderers and it was never simple. Some were meek—small people whose crimes went uncelebrated, like old Sonja the hash-slinger, with dimples in her

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elbows and dead dreams of stardom in her faded heart. Some others, like "Zero Man," held the city in a thrall of terror, their mark on us validated as much by big black headlines as by the corpses they left behind.

These killers were tried and convicted in court, where great and costly care was taken to reveal the smallest scenes of their scarred lives. I listened to the judge pronounce sentence on them, then later typed an S for Solved after their official case numbers. I closed the manila folders and filed them away, but I couldn't forget them. Reporters might tell newspaper readers how the murderer had bowed his head at the verdict and wept in repentance, or some other comforting coda to the dreadful and incomplete tale, and each time I learned more surely than before that truth is as welcome as the lash and rarely makes anyone free.

Certainly not me.

They told us at the 7:00 A.M. muster that Lieutenant Davy Mogaill from Central Robbery had been picked up a few hours earlier on suspicion of murder. Davy Mogaill, my rabbi.

It looked bad for Davy, they said. Already the television boys were onto it, and from the way they were shoving mikes into cops' faces on precinct stationhouse stoops up and down Manhattan it looked to be another big, ugly story about another of us gone rogue mad. Nobody had to remind us to keep our mouths shut around outsiders for the time being.

Like everybody else in the room that morning, I stood there and sadly shook my head at the news. Despite all the tough cop wisdom I enjoy thinking is mine, and despite all we'd meant to each other over the years, my first thoughts were a kind of betrayal. I asked myself, Can you ever really know about your friends?

My name is Neil Hockaday. I'm a detective, first grade, with a plainclothes detail known officially as Street Crimes Unit–Manhattan, though with more casual precision and a certain charm by the acronym SCUM Patrol. In the New York Police Department, this is a prestige assignment. I'm given latitude and my judgment is trusted, and since I don't wear blues I'm not likely to be stabbed, shot, mugged, bitten, or insulted with any appreciably greater frequency than your average civilian walking around in a Salvation Army overcoat, patched chinos, rayon turtleneck sweater from the bargain bin at Woolworth's, black high-top sneakers, navy-blue watch cap, four-day beard, and a paper bag with something inside

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that looks like a flat pint bottle but which is actually my shortwave PTP radio. All this I owe to Lieutenant Davy Mogaill.

I met him way back before he'd made lieutenant, when I was still a clean-shaven rookie on a foot post in the Twenty-sixth Precinct up in Morningside Heights. I'd done the short tour in Vietnam, then a couple of years at City College before they charged tuition, then signed on for the drill at Police Academy. The commission officer there was a mule-faced guy who looked like an extra from the movie version of *Deliverance* and he thought the funniest thing in the whole world was to assign his "college cops" to Morningside. Which in those days was thick with freelance radicals who hung around the Columbia and Barnard campuses and with fierce glee named all uniformed cops "pig" and were not shy about sticks and stones, either. They were right about the war and some other things, but they didn't have the couth of your average White House shill. Between that and what I was taking from my then wife Geraldine, even though we were still practically in the first blush of romantic heat, several cold ones after the shift was absolutely the only way to go.

So we pigs used to head up to Inwood by the carload after a tour, specifically to one certain dive on Broadway near Dyckman Street that had a juke heavy on "Ireland United," a liberal policy on check cashing as long as it wasn't personal, and a bartender who dealt in Guinness stout, Harp lager, Bushmill's, or Paddy's at only a half dollar the shot and thirty-cent draughts of domestic fizz when a man didn't know any better or had another day to go before payday. This retreat was in Manhattan's Thirty-fourth Precinct, well above the north boundary line from where we worked the Twenty-sixth—where, according to the book, we were not authorized for off-duty boozing for the several obvious reasons.

The place was called Nugent's and it was about evenly composed of Ancient Order of Hibernians types from the surrounding neighborhood, cops from the Twenty-sixth or the Fordham stationhouse just over the Harlem River in the South Bronx, novelists and poets and actors and other such layabouts, who enjoyed Inwood's cheap rents but complained about the long subway ride downtown, and cheerless Noraid operatives who mostly never imbibed themselves but who always collected the special weekend surcharges on every drink sold and then sent the money to numbered postal boxes in Ulster.

Since he was waving his arms and spilling his beer and quoting

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from Behan when I first laid eyes on him at Nugent's, I naturally figured Davy Mogaill for one of the house poets. His talk had color and melody to it, and so I never forgot the first thing I heard him say: "Ain't it loveliness to be here in a grand dark pub in New York, so bless't far removed from the bloody peat bogs and all them smelly farmers' tweeds? I'm thinking now it's truly how Brendan put it, 'I feel I'm a lonely flea what finally found his dog.' "

My own spirits were generous that night and so I told the barman, "A whiskey for the poet down there. Say it's thanks to a fellow admirer of himself, the Borstal Boy." Mogaill followed the barman's nod as the gift was poured out in front of him, saluted me with the glass and grinned, and put the whiskey back with one swallow. Then he was on his feet, to deliver personal thanks for a stranger's kindly treat.

He came at me the way a seasoned cop enters an unknown room—warily, eyes working the place over to catalogue the people and the furnishings. This was an occupational habit I hadn't yet picked up for my own, one of the many lessons I would come to learn from Davy Mogaill.

Mogaill was tall and square-built, with long thick arms and hands and ruddy skin, a man very clearly descended from generations of muscular tillers of the soil. His hair was red and curly, receding in front, and his eyes were pale-blue and unrevealing. I guessed him to be ten years my senior, though it turned out to be just seven. He was a little drunk, which as it turned out would be the usual way I'd see him.

"Where are your people from? On the other side, I mean?" he asked after we'd shaken hands and stated our names.

"County Dublin," I said. "The town of Dun Laoghaire. Going way back, there's some from County Carlow, too."

"I'm a Sligo man myself, and happy to be far and far away from home. Nugent's here is my snug. I have a place in Seaman Avenue, two blocks away." He put a dollar down on the bar and ordered us two of Bushmill's. "Hockaday. It sounds as if you might have some English blood tainting the line somewheres."

"Not a drop the family ever cares to mention."

Mogaill laughed and the whiskeys came, along with two Harps free of charge to regulars who went three rounds. Mogaill sipped his whiskey and watched me with his flat blue eyes. Then he drank the rest of it and half the lager, too. "This is now going to be what might

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strike you as a wild guess," he said, "but I'm saying you're a Thom McAn down in the Twenty-sixth. Am I right?"

I nodded. Mogaill knew the lingo, I thought. "You're a cop?"

"I am," he answered, "and a detective second grade already, my friend. And here you were thinking I'm a poet. Sure and that's maybe what I should have been." Mogaill began to slur his words. "My father has said to me since I was a boy that I'm cursed with being too damned curious about what it is that people choose to hide from the world. Did you never hear it told of the poet's natural right of trespass?"

And did Davy Mogaill ever finish explaining himself on this interesting point? Maybe he couldn't since he'd drunk so much that his thoughts went slurry and uncertain, like his words. Or maybe it grew so noisy that night in Nugent's that I couldn't make out what he said. I do remember him saying much more, though, and some of it about his father. But I don't remember it all exactly and saw no particular reason to at the time.

It was the father who was killed.

The murderer had been quick and quiet, and had evidently worked under the benefit of familiarity. There were no signs of a break-in at Davy's four-room flat in the big corner apartment house at Seaman Avenue and Isham Street. The couple downstairs had heard some thumping overhead around midnight, but this was not of itself unusual—Davy often crashed about the place after returning home from a night's drinking, before collapsing into bed. And since his father, Eamonn Mogaill, had come visiting from Sligo six weeks earlier, it was now even more often that the two burly men crashed about upstairs late into an alcoholic night.

What alerted Davy's neighbors to the slaughter just over their sleeping heads was a steady drip of water through the bathroom floor that became a flood when their ceiling gave way. Then, after frantically pounding on Davy's door in the deep-black stillness of early morning, they made the emergency call to the police when the only response was the sound of gushing water. The crowbar lent by a frightened super to the cops sprung open the bolted door and Eamonn Mogaill was discovered naked, wet, and dead in the old-fashioned clawfoot bathtub, a leg straddled over one curving side of the porcelain, an arm slung over the other side, and a toe hooked in the spokes of the flowing hot-water tap. There was a long, rude knife slice at the bottom of his deflated belly and another slice at

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the throat. His wide face had gone ashen blue and the warm, blood-tinged water streamed everywhere.

This I learned as quickly as I could after muster, with a telephone call from the street up to Scanlon of the Thirty-fourth Precinct homicide squad. "I'll tell you basics, which is all we got now, anyway," Scanlon said, "and then I'd appreciate it very much if you wouldn't bother me again, okay, Hock?"

"Okay."

"I know Davy Mogaill's your rabbi and all that, but he's my perp and what he done to his old man he done in my territory."

I told Scanlon I got the point. So he read me through the who-what-where-when and probable how. But since I was mostly after why, I had a couple of questions. Scanlon agreed to answer them, but only on the further understanding that I would be owing him someday.

"Davy's old man was last night about twelve innocently enjoying himself in the soak when suddenly there was the very big surprise of a shiv. He is cut so good that he don't have the strength to stand up, and he can't holler for help on account of the rip in his neck, so that's likely why his toe gets wrapped in the faucet."

"He figured he'd overflow the tub and get himself some attention?"

"Could be," Scanlon said. "Or else it's an accident from when he might have been thrashing around before he croaked out. Anyhow, that don't matter so much as the fact that what's missing from the family picture is Davy."

Loyally, I suggested, "So if Davy wasn't there, then somebody else stuck his father."

"It don't add up that way, I'm afraid. Plenty of circumstances against it. First off, we look around Davy's place and see that from the two sets of dirty dishes out in the kitchen, Davy and Daddy shared themselves a big steak for supper, with potatoes that looked like hell if you're asking me. Also, there's empty glasses around—beer and shots for two. So it looks like a duck and it walks like a duck: these two Mogaills spent the night in, together."

I had to oblige the telephone company with another quarter. Then I asked, "What about your other incriminating circumstantial evidence?"

"Well, the dead-bolts were on, which is how come we had to bust down the door. When we got inside, we found a couple of chain locks just dangling there on the interior jamb. See how that don't add up? Before we popped the door, we looked it over careful for marks of

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a jimmy job, but zip. So the only damage is what we done. Nobody got into that apartment—or out—who didn't have a key to open up, or lock up after he did the old man.

"I sent a man down to Nugent's saloon to speak with the late-shift alkies. A very talkative bunch. Nobody'd seen Davy nor Eamonn Mogaill since the day before. Plus, we find a box in the coat closet at the apartment that's full of Eamonn's letters, which are answers to his son's letters and which I can generally tell you are not what I'd call glad tidings."

"Where did you collar Davy?" I asked.

"Downtown at his girl friend's dump. One of the alkies at Nugent's lets it drop how Davy's been spending a lot of time lately hanging out with Roxy Something-or-Other who sings with a band at the Nice-Nice Club, which is one of them precious joints in the Village. You know, one of them cabarets that don't hop until Johnny Carson comes on and it reeks of Brut and it's all full of guys who wear lace on their drawers?"

"No, I don't know, Scanlon. You tell me."

"Take a flying leap, Hock." But the way he said this, he wasn't actually offended. "Anyways, we go down to the Nice-Nice and ask this pencil-neck maitre d' about the canary, figuring she is what's going to lead us to Davy, who's off his nut and would run to her without thinking. It turns out Roxy's got a room with a hotplate four flights up. Which is where we find her, all flushed in the cheeks and short of breath for some reason that looks like it's making her feel wonderful—along with Lieutenant Guess Who in his white boxers with the pink and red valentines all over them."

"So Roxy is Davy's alibi."

"Some alibi. This chirp, she ain't bound for Carnegie Hall and so she has her sidelines. Nothing big, she's just a rent-payer. A little money off the farm, out-of-town admirers she carries on the ledgers, that sort of stuff. Hell, Davy himself pinched her this summer on accessory charges to a Saks heist one of her local Uncle Sugars pulled and used her dump to hide the swag for a while."

"So she owed him."

"You could say that, for the spit it's worth. There ain't an assistant D.A. in the city who'd sweat the chirp's alibi potential on a jury. Roxy's say-so that a middle-aged Irish cop boozer would be up to panting in her dump all the night long is maybe good enough to get him out of the jug until charges are brought, but she ain't likely to be doing him no favors at the trial. Which is where Davy's headed

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and fast. Hell, they indict ham sandwiches for less than what we got on your buddy Mogaill."

Davy would be down at Central Lock-Up until late in the afternoon before he had a chance of leaving. He wouldn't be in a cell, but he might as well be. By now they would have inked him and shot the front-and-profiles and maybe called up his priest from Good Shepherd parish in Inwood. They would have fed him something he couldn't taste and now, no doubt, he was sitting alone on one side of a green steel table with folding chairs around it, in the center of an airless rectangular room with a wide two-way mirror built into one of the long walls for viewing lineups. If he got up to try the door, maybe to go out and be sick in the loo, he'd find it locked shut. Or there would be a uniform on the other side of it assigned to accompany him wherever he cared to go within the confines of the building and with his holster emptied.

Davy's gut would be burning from a lot of black coffee and blacker guilt, and the dread of a full day of interrogations after a night made sleepless by Scanlon. First up would be somebody with excellent teeth and good clothes in his or her twenties from the Manhattan D.A.'s office, then somebody with excellent teeth and better clothes in his or her thirties from the U.S. Attorney's special municipal corruption unit, then somebody in his late forties with cigarette teeth and a polyester three-piece from Internal Affairs, the kind of cop who knows that every other kind of cop calls him "leper" behind his back. And all the while, sitting beside Davy to guard his interests during all this, would be a fat guy pushing sixty with broken red veins on his nose, cigar ashes on his corduroy jacket, and false teeth that clacked. This would be the counselor retained by the outfit where Davy paid quarterly dues—the N.Y.P.D. Lieutenants and Sergeants Endowment and Protective Society.

I had until the end of shift, three o'clock, to figure out how I could help Davy, if at all, and what I could say to a man I hadn't seen in something like three years, a man I owed heavily for his guidance. It was Mogaill who advised me to get into the SCUM Patrol if I could. "Special units get you better notice and faster advancements," he said. And it was Mogaill who one evening at Nugent's blessed my rotten divorce with a fine absolution. "The painful thing of it is, Hock, you weren't yet the man prepared to be a serious character in the story of his life and neither was your missus so prepared for herself. I'll now welcome you both to the multitudes of the human

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race—Godspeed your discovery that these common tragedies are memory's jests in time." Davy Mogaill, my rabbi.

I decided the best I might do for Davy would be to find myself a good early collar to fill up the tour, after which I could then hook up with him down at Central Lock-Up if they wanted to let him loose. Then maybe lots of whiskey and a proper dinner, and then I'd work at getting him home for the oblivion of a two-day crash.

Since I happened to be working out of Midtown South, a quick collar would be easy enough. I headed up to Forty-second Street in Times Square in search of a three-card monte setup or maybe a shell game, both of which are plentiful in the prime tourist months but peter out toward the end of October along with the dwindling hordes of out-of-town marks. Con artists along the Deuce grow careless during this off-season, a little too eager for the flash of any available sucker's cash. The difference between grabbing a sucker's money from his hands and coaxing him into laying down his own bet is the crucial difference between felonious larceny and the misdemeanor of promoting gambling. A larceny bust fills up a tour nicely, since the arresting officer is generally obligated to do his own booking and shipping work and since it happens I'm a slow typist.

I got very lucky at the corner of Seventh Avenue. There was a "top-of-the-ball" con in swing. Ordinarily, this is a team-effort shell game consisting of a "springer," two "sticks," and three "wallmen." The sticks and the springer work a salt-and-pepper routine. The springer is always a black guy with talented hands for the basic cross-over monte shuffle, only for top-of-the-ball he uses three bottle caps, one of which covers a little red ball. The sticks are always white and wide-eyed, maybe one of them a guy in wingtips and a business suit with one of those yellow neckties and the other one looking like she spends most days driving kids around in a station wagon somewhere over in Jersey. The sticks seem to be winning regularly off the fast-talking springer and the marks are reassured and start lining up for the fleece. The wallmen are lookouts and give high signs in the event they spot a plainclothes cop, in which case the springer kicks over the cardboard box he's using for his table, the game is struck, and the team moves on. At the end of an average day at the height of the tourist season, a modestly accomplished team splits five grand six ways and nobody bothers about dealing in the I.R.S.

But this time it was a solo act, just one lonesome springer braving the odds against somebody from the SCUM Patrol taking too much

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interest in such action once the visitors were gone away. The poor sod. He stood there shivering in a T-shirt and a light sweater, stamping his feet for some warmth as hundreds of office workers emerged from the subway station with their coats and briefcases and frosted breath. He looked like he needed money badly and I felt sorry about what I was going to do to him.

He shuffled his bottle caps and chanted at the crowd, "Don't be a jerk and go to work, make it here quick and call in sick! Spent your dough on a New York show? Come one, come all, lay your money on the ball!"

A couple of secretaries in down jackets and finger-waved hair stopped chewing their gum to watch. "See it crawl like a little red fly on the wall—top-of-the-ball!" The springer did his cross-over shuffle and anybody would swear the ball was under the middle cap.

"You see where the ball went?" the springer asked.

One of the secretaries laughed and pointed to the middle cap.

"Show me your forty dollars to go against mine and I'm going to press dead Presidents into your pretty hand," the springer said. He pulled a twenty and two tens from his pocket and thrust them at her.

The secretary rummaged around inside her pocketbook for money, pulled out two twenties, and said, "I don't know—"

At this point, a stick would have jumped into the situation and allayed all doubt by taking the bet. And the springer would reshuffle and smile and make the ball come natural for the wingtips and suit, who would then be loudly delighted to take forty bucks and make it look easy. And then the secretary would no longer be reluctant and the springer would reshuffle and cross-over. Only there were no sticks now. And the springer was desperate, and careless.

"Gimme your bet!" he snarled. He grabbed the secretary's forty and I moved up behind him and tapped his shoulder.

"How you doing this morning, Friendly?" I said.

"Oh, sheet," the springer said, "you the Murphy?"

I said I was and showed him the gold shield on the chain I had stuffed down inside my turtleneck. I also opened my greasy trench a little bit so he could see the .44 Charter Arms Bulldog in my shoulder holster. "I'm going to read you now, Friendly— We got felony larceny here, so listen up."

"Sheet."

The secretary started screaming something about a broken nail and being late for work, and the springer lurched, like he might try

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running down the subway stairs. I caught him at the neck with the crook of my arm, squeezed, and suggested it was the better part of valor for him to come along with me peaceably. He saw things my way, largely in the interest of breathing, so I let up on his neck and locked one end of a pair of N.Y.P.D. bracelets to my left wrist and the other end to his right.

I told the secretary, "Go on to work and telephone me at the Midtown South stationhouse. Ask for Hock." I gave her the number and she said yeah and I knew she'd never call. I'd write up paper the rest of the day and jug the springer, who would go off to Riker's for a couple of days and ultimately not be convicted of larceny in the absence of a material witness besides the arresting officer.

At five o'clock, they let Davy out of Central Lock-Up. I had to arrange custody through a sergeant who warned me, "He gets to leave because he's got some half-assed alibi that's got great legs on her but not the kind that stands up in court later on. But the lawyer tells me we treat him like any other suspected perp and so out he goes. Lieutenant Mogaill is now officially on your head. That understood?"

Perfectly, I said.

Davy Mogaill looked about as bad as a man can. There were long dark lines in his forehead and around his eyes and they looked as if someone had drawn them in with a charcoal pencil. The rest of his face was the yellow-grey color of putrid eggs. His hair looked like it had been on fire not long ago. And his eyes were as dull blue and unhealthy-looking as skimmed milk.

By comparison, the lawyer from the Lieutenants and Sergeants Endowment and Protective Society looked like some Arrow Shirt model. "Ivan Grantcher's the name," he told me. I felt scales as we shook. Grantcher had hair growing out from his ears in clumps and his nose whistled.

I turned and said to Davy, "Why don't you at least get yourself a presentable attorney?"

Grantcher seemed to take offense. "Whaddya mean—"

"What would that matter?" Davy interrupted. "The Devil makes his Christmas pie from lawyers' tongues."

I took him by his broad shoulders and pressed him against me and the two of us stood there in the lobby of Central Lock-Up embraced in our slapping arms. We left Grantcher mumbling to himself and passing out his business cards to suspicious-looking characters.

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Out in the street, I said, "God, I'm sorry for your troubles."

"It's good to hear the condolences of an old friend," he told me, "but my real remedy lies in drink. Can you not see that I must put the apples back in my cheeks?"

We flagged a taxi and crawled through the afternoon rush-hour traffic to the Nice-Nice Club on Hudson Street. The hand-wringing maitre d' greeted us on the stairway up to Roxy's room with the unsurprising news that his house chirp had flown the coop. "Oh, the tramp," he said, blotting his forehead with a silk hankie. "She suddenly decided it was the perfect time to run off and visit some sister I never heard about up in Canada."

Davy laughed and I followed him upstairs. He let himself into Roxy's place with his set of the keys. There he took a soothing hot shower—and dried himself with the chenille bedspread since Roxy had taken the towels along with almost everything else.

"Here I am, fat and over fifty," Davy said, "and still I'm lusting after women, though none are lusting back any more. So you see, I've settled for even a woman's treachery." Wrapped in the chenille bedspread, he looked out the single window in the room and said into the newly black night, "I am my father's son."

We took the A train uptown through Chelsea, Times Square, Hell's Kitchen, Harlem, and Washington Heights, forty minutes without a word. When we got to Inwood, we stepped off the subway at Dyckman Street and walked the familiar blocks to Nugent's.

The place was full of grey smoke and noise, but it died once the crowd saw Davy walk into the place with his thirsty sorrow. One by one, the regulars expressed themselves to him. "We're sorry for your trouble, Davy." "Sorry for your troubles, mate." "I'm sorry for—" And the quiet prevailed, out of respect for Eamonn Mogaill's violent death and Davy Mogaill's pain.

Against the soft sound of clicking billiard balls from the backroom, we drank together and talked of other things. Davy asked about my day and I told him how I'd collared the top-of-the-ball springer, and the small mercy of it being strictly on an officer's complaint. He laughed. And then he finally said something of what he'd been thinking all the while.

"Did I never tell you, Neil, of my old man?"

I bought us another two of Bushmill's and said he'd mentioned him once or twice.

"He was a man nobody was allowed to admire. My mother saw to

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this by keeping him mainly to herself. It's a tragedy for a man, that. And rarely does the victim ever know it as such."

I asked how this was so.

"My lasting memory of Eamonn Mogaill, now that I look back on him as just another man, is that he could never call anybody his mate. I grew up watching him try to carry on with the other men in Sligo and seeing him fail most of the time, hearing the men and boys make fun of him behind his back—such a clumsy and angry man in his loneliness. In the rare case when he did strike up a friendship, my mother would begin to belittle this other fellow so bad that my old man could hardly keep anything else in mind about the man, and it poisoned things between him and any men who might have been his pals. Do you see what I'm saying? Do you see how the isolation did him in?"

I said I didn't entirely see.

"He had her and only her. And that terrible reliance will make any man weak. She made it worse by praising what she called his 'principles,' encouraging him to be so rigid no man could see anything else of him. Old Eamonn grew so he couldn't tell the difference between his principles and his prejudices. And so he put himself outside."

I was beginning to understand, I told Davy.

"He became a terrible man." Davy finished his drink and bought us two more. I let mine sit for a while. "It's finally why I left when I was only seventeen. He got so lonely and so angry in that place, knowing he could never be young like me and leave it, he took to beating me every day. And he beat her, too. I told her once I'd take us both away, to Dublin or London or New York. And do you know what her response was?" Davy was mostly talking to himself now. He'd taken drinks from many of the others and he was slurring heavily. I had only to raise my eyebrows and he would talk on. "She said to me, 'You're my fine brave boy, Davy.' Then later that same day she told my father in a way calculated to put him into a rage. And he beat me, yelling, 'So you're trying to break up our family, are you now?'

"He beat her, too, afterward, and she forgave him with her tears. And deeper in her debt he went. It was the first I learned of the feminine treacheries, see?"

I began to see more than Davy intended. I began to consider the messy truth.

"That was the pattern of our happy home," Davy said. "Everything

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was twisted around to the point of some awful offense to my father's principles or to his pride or to his privacy—or to whatever else it was that my mother convinced him was holy. So he drank. How else could he have survived?"

Davy lifted his hand and the barman poured him another. "Do you see how I'm my father's son?" Davy slurred. He put back the whiskey. "That's how old Eamonn drank his. He'd drink all night in the pubs, sitting alone and watching everyone else.

"He'd announce his arrival home with yelling and sometimes beatings for us both. My mother learned a way of weeping without making a sound, and you could see how it cut him to be around her then. So late at night when he couldn't sleep, I would see him standing at the icebox with a glass bottle of milk in his hand. He'd drink down the milk and I think it helped put out the fire because it seemed for those several minutes out of a furious day he was at peace at last."

"Did you talk to him then?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I did. Many times I came creeping out from the shadows of the stairs and he'd tell me I was too damn curious for my own good. But he never hit me then—at least there was that. Even so, all I wanted was to flee that place."

"And so you came to New York."

"That's it. It wasn't so hard for me, what with uncles and aunties and shirttail relations all over the place."

I asked him about the letters Scanlon had mentioned—the correspondence from his father he'd kept in a closet.

"Angry stuff it was," Davy said. "I provoked it by telling him how it was I saw his miseries. He wrote back and told me how he'd beat me if I were there in front of him, old as he was. Then he stopped writing—and the next thing I knew he was at my door."

"And that was six weeks ago," I said. "Did the two of you fight?"

Davy looked at me suspiciously. "Mostly," he said. Then his eyes drooped and the fatigue took over his body. He started swaying and I held an arm to keep him from falling to the floor. Softly he said, "His life was a sham. Like your shell game on Forty-second Street. Only old Eamonn never did wise up to the trick shuffles. Some men never do—and, the Devil in hell, I'm one of them myself."

"Tell me you didn't kill him, Davy."

"Talk to my esteemed counsel."

He would say no more that night. Somehow I got him home. I hobbled up Broadway in the heavy fog that rolls into Inwood through

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the Spuyten Duyvil to the Hudson, Davy's arm stretched over my shoulder and mine around his waist. Up to Isham Street and around the corner to his building, then up in the elevator to his flat. I dumped him onto his bed on his back, and his mouth fell open and he snored. I pulled off his shoes and loosened up his clothes, then I went out to the kitchen and made myself a pot of tea and sat down with it by the telephone in the parlor.

I thought how easy it was for Scanlon and the D.A. and any other interested party to see that the killer of Eamonn Mogaill was his own embittered son, and how Davy was plainly the little red ball under the bottle cap in the middle.

Davy woke up just before noon the next day. When he did, the first thing he saw was Scanlon standing at the foot of his bed smoking a cigar. Then he noticed the kid with the good teeth from the Manhattan D.A.'s office, whispering in the bedroom doorway with Ivan Grantcher, the down-at-the-heels lawyer for the defense. I was there, too.

"We've got some bad news for you, Davy," I said.

Mogaill tried sitting up, but thought better of it. "I'll take it lying down," he said.

Scanlon blurted, "Your little old Irish mother is croaked, too."

"Thanks, Scanlon," I said. "We didn't want too fine a point on the announcement."

Grantcher stepped up to Davy's bed. "What that means in practical terms," he said, "is that you're off the hook. You ain't the perp in your old man's murder."

Davy shut his eyes.

"I made some calls last night," I told him. "I checked out all the airlines' manifests on the daily flight schedules from JFK to Dublin or Shannon and, bingo, there was a seven o'clock Aer Lingus to Shannon and the name of Mary Mairead Mogaill was on the passenger list."

"So you fancy yourself a detective, Hock?" Davy's eyes were open and looking at me.

"From what you told me while you were in your cups last night, I couldn't imagine your mother permitting your father to warm to you—especially not to you. It must have driven her mad knowing Eamonn had gone away to New York. Then she up and flew here herself, didn't she? She knew where you lived, so it wasn't any

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hardship for her to find her husband and begin working on him like she'd done all her life."

Davy was silent.

"Did you speak to her while she was here?"

"I did not," he said. "But I knew she'd come. I wouldn't let her into my place. But my old man must have given her the keys in the street."

Grantcher, with his nose whistling and exasperation in his voice, said, "And you never told me this?"

Davy ignored him and addressed me. "We had dinner and then I went downtown to see Roxy. My mother must have slipped up into the flat after I'd gone and done him in. I suppose I knew it would happen like that sooner or later. My own true alibi with Roxy was solid, so I thought—I didn't see the need to finger my mother. I figured Ivan here could work up a sufficient amount of reasonable doubt on my behalf—enough for an acquittal."

Grantcher shook his head and the assistant D.A. issued a soft, "Wow."

"You say my mother's dead?" Davy asked.

Grantcher answered. "She shoved a knife into her guts on the airplane while everybody was sleeping through the time zones somewhere over the Atlantic. She must not have made a sound, can you imagine that? The stewardess tossed her cookies when she tried waking up the lady with the blood in her lap."

The D.A. added, "The authorities at Shannon are analyzing the two blood types found on the knife. We presume one is your mother's type, the other your father's."

"They're now both dead and that is that at last," Davy said.

"You must tell me something, Hock, my shrewd detective friend," he said later. "Can you look me in the eye and honestly tell me that you feel wiser for trespassing into all this unlovely truth?"

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

"What sort of line did you feed him?" Myrlene asked Tommy.

"The truth—up to a point."

"And he bought it?"

"Haven't I made a career," he said, "out of selling the implausible to the skeptical . . .?"

WOULD I LIE TO YOU?

by DONALD OLSON

"Who's going to end up cooking his own goose? So how would you like your crow cooked, sweetheart?"

Tommy couldn't help needling Myrlene, she'd been so damned negative about his idea. But then, who could blame her for occasional lapses of confidence? Over the past ten years their married life had recorded more ups and downs than the Dow Jones Index.

"Never mind the geese and crows, *sweetheart*. Just don't start counting your chickens."

Cut your losses and run had been Myrlene's panicky advice when it appeared that those paranoid monkeys from New York were about to open a bottomless crevasse plunk in the middle of what had been a field of sweet clover, ready to be harvested. Tommy might have taken her advice if greed hadn't inspired him to come up with a scheme, brilliant in its simplicity. All it had required was to recruit another Tom Brown as greedy as Tommy himself—and as the city directory listed no fewer than twenty-five, seven with the same middle initial as Tommy's, this hadn't proved an insuperable obstacle.

"So what's he like?" Myrlene wanted to know.

"A mouse. A churchmouse. Poor and hungry. You should see the dump he lives in. Alone. And he's the right age."

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"But does he look anything like you?"

"How many times do I have to tell you? He doesn't *have* to! My picture's not on my Gurney I.D. badge. And those birds at Stateside Investigations, the firm hired to run the tests, don't know me from Adam. The name is all that matters."

"What sort of line did you feed him?"

"The truth—up to a point. That I'm a big wheel in Accounting at Gurney. That the conglomerate who acquired Gurney was burned in the DeFasco swindle and insists on every employee at Gurney submitting to a lie-detector test. I told him a number of us resent such invasions of our privacy and have waged a futile battle against it. But that I, personally, intend to prove just how inconclusive such tests can be."

"And he bought it?"

"Haven't I made a career out of selling the implausible to the skeptical? Sure, he was a bit leery at first—until I mentioned the two grand he'd earn for a few minutes' work."

Myrlene was a big woman, taller than Tommy, broad in the hips, but with a certain style and comeliness upon which the vicissitudes of life with Thomas Richard Brown had done little damage. Tommy hadn't held up quite so well, but then Tommy had spent more than one term in the slammer. The bags under his eyes were permanent luggage now, the two chins nearly equal in size, and about all that remained of his youthful good looks was a full crop of wavy brown hair.

"You're certain he's squeaky clean?" Myrlene persisted.

"He gave me his word, and I made it clear that if it turned out he was lying, he wouldn't get a dime—and he might find himself in a heap of trouble. That ruffled his feathers. Telling the truth, he said, is the one Commandment he's never broken."

"What about all the others?"

"Figure of speech, sweetheart. He swears he has no criminal record. That's all we care about. So he can go in there, pass as me, and truthfully declare he's never been charged or convicted of any criminal offense."

"And when do I meet this paragon of honesty?"

"I'll pick him up tonight. All we have to do is house and feed him for a week. He speaks his piece, gets paid—ha ha—and that's it."

"I still wish we could pull out before you're supposed to take that stupid test."

"You know that's impossible. It'll take a week to close those bogus

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accounts and cash in. We need as big a head start as possible before they catch onto what happened. If I didn't show up for that test, they'd begin asking questions too soon. But by the time those knuckleheads run an audit, we'll be yachting on Moonlight Bay, baby."

Myrlene giggled. "If they ever find out how many fraud convictions you've had, and how many little trips up the river—"

"Past history, sweetheart. Never look back, that's my credo."

At first glimpse of her husband's namesake, Myrlene was reminded less of a mouse than of an Easter bunny, pink and plump, with elflike ears and mild, prominent blue eyes in a face that had seemingly never made the transition from adolescence to adulthood. He wore a shabby blue-serge suit so shiny it looked like silk, and scruffy brown-and-white loafers.

Playing roles had been a necessary part of Myrlene's life with Tommy. On this occasion, she adopted a combination of ladylike refinement and cozy familiarity.

"I do think it's heroic of you, Mr. Brown, to help my husband prove his point of principle. It's by no means a caprice, you know. Both Tommy and I feel strongly about the increasingly insidious threat to our individual liberties."

Tom Brown bobbed his head in agreement. "If I didn't share your concern, Mrs. Brown, I'd never have agreed to impersonate your husband. Not that the money wasn't an inducement. I never tell a lie, so I won't lie about that."

Tommy put an arm around Brown's shoulder. "Come along, old chap, I'll show you your room. And the new duds we bought for you. We spared no expense."

"I won't let you down, sir. So long as you're correct about the questions I'll be asked. I refuse to lie, you know."

Tommy once more explained to him how he personally, with the backing of the plant union, which had vigorously opposed the polygraph-testing mandate, had been instrumental in reaching a compromise with the people who now controlled Gurney. No questions about drugs, sex, or other irrelevancies. Each employee would be asked three, and only three, questions:

What is your name?

What is your address?

Have you ever been charged, convicted, or incarcerated for any criminal offense?

"You can answer them with complete honesty," said Tommy. "As

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I could myself if I weren't determined to make my point. You are Thomas R. Brown, you do reside at 33 Arlington Terrace—at least as of now you do—and you've no criminal record."

Myrlene studied their guest's face. "That is the truth, isn't it? What shall I call you? May I call you Little Tom?"

"Fine by me, Mrs. B. And it is true—I've never been charged with so much as a traffic violation."

"How commendable," she beamed.

Tommy had made it clear to their guest that he should consider himself just that—an honored guest, free to do as he wished. Little Tom protested. The least he could do to help earn his generous stipend was to be useful around the house, and he'd noticed how badly the garden needed attention.

"Really, sweetheart, the man's a treasure," declared Myrlene after Little Tom had been there only two days. "You can see what he's doing in the garden. He's cleaned the house till it sparkles—and who do you think cooked those stuffed pork chops tonight?"

"Fine. Let him earn his wages, they're steep enough."

Conversation at the dinner table was necessarily limited in scope, but without awkward constraints. Little Tom was quite willing to talk about himself. They learned he was from the Midwest and had lived in the city for almost five years, subsisting on odd jobs.

"You wouldn't believe how long I'm going to be able to live on the money you're paying me. I'm not lying. My needs are few."

"You're to be envied," sighed Myrlene. But not by her, who shuddered at the vision of such a penurious lifestyle. "One day I hope my dear Tommy can resign from the rat race."

"We shall, my love," said Tommy, with a wink. "Maybe sooner than you think."

"In the meantime we've promised ourselves a nice long vacation, starting the first of next week."

Little Tom beamed. "Where will you go?"

"That's Tommy's secret. He wants me to be surprised."

"Just living in this beautiful house would be vacation enough for me."

"You've never had a real home?"

"When my wife was alive. After she died, my wants were simpler."

"What was she like?" Myrlene inquired, sensing he wanted to reminisce. Clearly, she was wrong. His face lengthened.

"She wasn't a very easy woman to live with. Impossible to please.

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Never satisfied. Will you be shocked if I tell you I didn't shed a tear when she died of acute respiratory failure? It's the truth, folks. Would I lie to you?"

"Never. You're a lesson to us all," intoned Tommy virtuously.

Tommy, ostensibly leaving the office to keep his appointment at the investigator's office for his polygraph test, drove straight home. Little Tom had already left to keep the appointment.

"Was he nervous?" Tommy asked Myrlene.

"Like a catatonic zombie. I'm the one who's nervous. What if something goes wrong?"

"Nothing will. Relax. Have you started packing? I want to be out of here by first light tomorrow. The bank draft will be waiting for us in Mexico City."

"You're sure they don't suspect anything?"

"By the time they do we'll be on the beach in Rio."

"Little Tom was a great help with the packing. He even insisted on ironing a few things for me."

A taxi arrived and Little Tom strolled in with as jaunty an air of unconcern as if he'd just come back from a light-hearted movie.

"No trouble," he assured them. "They asked me only the questions you said they would. They were even nice enough to tell me—tell *you,* sir—you came through with flying colors." He handed Tommy the Gurney I.D. badge.

"Splendid." Tommy patted Little Tom on the shoulder. "You've earned your fee, old chap. When I get home tonight I'll have your check for you. We must have a little celebration."

"When will you tell them what we did, and why?"

Tommy looked thoughtful. "Not until after all the test results are in. Let's hope it teaches them a lesson."

"Hear hear," agreed his namesake.

"I must get back to the office," said Tommy, planting a quick kiss on Myrlene's cheek.

When he was gone, Little Tom changed his clothes and resumed his task of digging up the rose garden and Myrlene went upstairs to collect Little Tom's white shirt for laundering. In his apparent eagerness to get back to work, he had left his good clothes strewn across the bed and she smiled at this evidence of less than exemplary behavior in their meticulous house guest. When she picked up his trousers, a wallet fell to the floor. She retrieved it and placed it on

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the bureau—but then, with a quick look toward the door, she riffled through it, finding nothing of interest except a newspaper clipping folded into a little square.

Five years old, datelined Chicago, it gave an account of the discovery of the body of a woman identified as Mrs. Annabel Brown in the basement of her Cicero home. The woman had been strangled with a length of clothesline, and evidence at the scene indicated the possibility of a double homicide. A search was underway for the woman's husband, Thomas R. Brown, who was thought to have been abducted.

Stunned, Myrlene recalled Little Tom's description of his wife. *She wasn't a very easy woman to live with.* And his euphemistic explanation of how she had died: acute respiratory failure. He certainly hadn't lied about that.

She was hastily refolding the clipping when she heard a sound behind her and whirled. To face Little Tom, who stood in the doorway regarding her with his placid smile. His gaze traveled from the clipping in her hand to the wallet on the bureau. "Were you looking for something?" he asked mildly.

Myrlene smiled shakily. "I—I was going to put your shirt in the laundry and hang up your suit. Your billfold fell out."

He stepped forward and gently removed the clipping from her hand. "I made it look that way—that a stranger had done it—and then I ran away."

"You swore to us you had no criminal record."

"I don't. Would I lie to you? I was never charged with anything."

Myrlene backed away. "Well, you've nothing to fear from us. We wouldn't dream of telling anyone. It wouldn't be in our interests, you can understand that. What's done is done, that's our attitude."

Little Tom looked genuinely distressed. "If only I could believe that. But you and Mr. Brown have such high principles. I did violate Annabel's rights as an individual—I can't lie and pretend I didn't—and I can't expect you to condone what I did."

"Oh, but you can. We *do*. We *will*. I'm afraid we haven't been entirely honest with you. If you would just let me explain—"

She was still trying to explain as Little Tom picked up the necktie from the bed and briskly snapped it around her throat.

Tommy found his guest in the kitchen bending over the stove. "Where's Myrlene?" he asked jovially.

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Little Tom glanced up. "She was in the garden last time I saw her."

Tommy went out to the garden. The freshly dug rose garden attested to Little Tom's hard work. But there was no sign of Myrlene. Puzzled, he walked back into the house. Little Tom was pouring wine into two glasses. "Forgive my grubby appearance," he said. "I thought I wouldn't bother changing until I'd finished my work in the garden."

Tommy smiled. Such industry. "Looks finished to me."

"Not quite." His namesake held out a glass to Tommy. "I thought we might drink a little toast to our success."

"Splendid idea. But where the devil is Myrlene? We ought to wait for her."

"To tell the truth, Mr. Brown, I already tied one on with Mrs. Brown. I've an idea she's lying down."

"You rascal, Little Tom." Tommy lifted the glass.

"I'd better warn you, sir. I put something in your drink."

"Oh?"

"I thought it needed an extra special kick. It'll probably knock you off your heels."

Tommy took a sip. "By Harry, you're right. No wonder Myrlene's lying down."

"I'll sure miss you folks. Such a perfect couple. But it's nice to know you'll always be together."

Tommy didn't answer. He was already on the floor.

Little Tom washed the glass, poured the rest of the bottle down the drain, and then decided to have a bite to eat before resuming his gardening. He stood looking around the room with a fondly proprietary air. He would enjoy living here. He wouldn't even have to change the name on the mailbox. And if anyone inquired, he would claim to be a cousin of Mr. Brown's, house-sitting for them.

Not that anyone would come snooping. Such a quiet, retiring couple, the Browns. Mrs. B. had admitted they had no close friends or relatives in the area. No, their absence wasn't likely to stir anyone's interest. They were much too ordinary.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

DENNIS O'NEIL

The entrance to the store was slightly ajar. Rafe entered, paused, scanned the aisles and soda fountain, barely visible in the light from the neon Sealtest Ice Cream sign. Beyond them, at the rear, the prescription department was shadowed. Rafe heard the grumble of a compressor and the tiny, odd creaks and scrapes he always heard in places that weren't usually quiet. Then he heard another sound.

Our first story from Dennis O'Neil, senior editor of DC Comics, Inc., in more than fourteen years. As in "Alias the Last Resort" (January 1974 EQMM), the protagonist is private investigator Rafe Grogan, stepfather of Kobo Daishi Grogan and ex-husband of Margaret Grogan, his first wife, now deceased . . .

MARGARET YOU MOURN FOR

by DENNIS O'NEIL

A few hours ago, I learned that my ex-wife died. Margaret Schneider Grogan, dead before her fortieth birthday, of Karsakov's Syndrome. A bad way to go.

I found out by accident. I had just finished a job in St. Louis—one of the mortgage-payers I'm forced to accept now and then—and suddenly I started coughing so hard I nearly lost control of the car. The job had forced me to follow an embezzler-turned-coke dealer for miles through a cold November rain that he was prepared for and I wasn't. So I turned off the interstate and into the parking lot of one of those suburban malls that are becoming the dominant architectural form of the Midwest.

In a Walgreen's I scored a tin of double-strength Sucrets. As I was leaving the drugstore, I met Barry Koenig, whom I hadn't seen for

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a long time, and we chatted while standing under the overhang, him gently bragging about his five kids and me explaining that I had sold my interest in the agency, was living in a small town in central Missouri with my adopted son, Kobo. After five minutes or so, the conversation lost energy. Both of us stared at the shiny asphalt for a few seconds and listened to the rain. I was trying to think of a graceful exit line. When Barry started talking again, I thought he'd beaten me to it—but instead he said, "Sorry to hear about Peggy."

"What about her?"

Somehow, although I hadn't seen or heard from Peg in almost a decade, I knew what he was going to tell me when he finished being too embarrassed to continue.

"She passed away. Last month."

"I didn't know."

"Guess I should've called."

"Not your fault." And it wasn't. Barry had never been more than a casual acquaintance.

He shuffled, and shifted his weight in the direction of the parking lot. "If there's anything I can do." I could almost smell his discomfort.

"Barry, Peg and I weren't close."

"Well"—he was moving away—"good seeing you, Rafe. Next time you're in town, give us a jingle."

"Sure will, Barry. Say hello to Mandy for me."

"You take care."

He was forty feet away when I asked, "What did she die of?"

"I didn't hear." He dived into a blue station wagon as though it were his personal portal to salvation and I watched it glide onto an access road.

I went to a pay phone, got a number from Information, and used it.

Then Peg's older sister, Junie, was telling me how Peg had died, stammering an explanation, trying to define Karsakov's Syndrome without mentioning alcohol or drunkenness or addiction.

"That's okay, June," I said. "I remember what it is."

Wet brain. A softening of brain tissue caused by alcohol abuse.

A second earlier, Junie had been defensive. Now she was accusing. "We'd of let you know only you never gave us your address—"

I'd always had problems with the accusing Junie and I wasn't going to listen until she'd completed her indictment, but instead of hanging up I surprised myself by asking, "How's Peter?"

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"Oh, he's real good." She was defensive again. "Got work at J. C. Penney, no sickness or anything at all."

Until that moment, I hadn't been aware of any feeling other than curiosity. But something deeper, stronger tightened my fingers on the receiver. Sorrow? No, and not anger or pity, either. Peter healthy, Peggy dead. Is irony an emotion? A powerful emotion? It was one of those instants when past and present rush together and I was in senior English class hearing Sister Mary Magdalen read a poem about a young girl named Margaret:

"Nor mouth had, no nor mind expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for."

I told Junie goodbye without making any promises I had no intention of keeping and returned to my car. I switched on the engine, turned up the heater, and contemplated my sopping sneakers, the whish of the wipers, the purple glow of the mercury vapor lamps. It was late afternoon, already dark, getting colder, and I could taste the phlegm mingled with Sucret flavor in my throat. My sinuses were clogging and I hadn't been in really dry clothing since I'd last slept, nearly twenty hours ago.

I should have gotten back on the interstate and tried to outrace serious flu symptoms home. But Margaret Schneider *Grogan* was dead. My Margaret, my Peg, darling steamfitter's daughter, blue-collar madonna, first girl to answer yes to at least three momentous questions, the lust and later light of my life, my bride and finally the only woman ever to say she hated me. I ought to mourn. But how? Visit the grave? I'd forgotten to ask Junie where Peg was buried and, anyway, the cemetery would certainly be closed by the time I arrived. No, no kneeling, either on soggy turf or in a church, mumbling prayers I couldn't believe in.

I drove to the old neighborhood. Maybe I should say I made a pilgrimage to the old neighborhood. North St. Louis. Single-family dwellings, frame or red brick, with lawns and back yards and basketball hoops nailed to garages. The area has changed: the faces are black and the store windows advertise foods the Irish and Italian families of my youth would have considered barbarian. But it's still the old neighborhood, recognizable, still a place built for and by the working class, disdain and fear of pretension visible in the very shapes of the houses. I looked at the schoolyard, the house where

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Peg passed her childhood, my father's house, the church where we were married, and, at last, in the grip of a perverse impulse, I went to what had been Wohowski's Pharmacy.

It's now a discount shoe outlet. Somehow, that disappointed me. Of course, I knew that Walter Wohowski was dead, had been dead for years. He'd survived the beating Peter gave him, which saved my brother-in-law from a murder charge, but he'd been in his late sixties the night Peter had lain fist to him and I've always been certain that Peter had at least hastened his death.

Peg and I hadn't yet celebrated our first wedding anniversary when it happened. It had been rough, that first year. Peggy had gotten pregnant early on, maybe on our wedding night, and although I hadn't wanted kids right away, Peggy glowed. She wasn't ever the career type; the few dollars she'd earned were earned at menial jobs—clerking in a neighborhood grocery, baby-sitting, jobs to mark time until she began her vocation, being a wife and mother. She was bright, but she was a firm believer in the old ways, in the traditional woman's place.

She miscarried in her second month. The day she was released from the hospital, the doctor told us she'd never be able to have children because of a misshapen uterus. During the drive home, I chattered, I filled the car with words: a weird case Manny had thrown at me, a new TV show, a sports jacket I'd just bought, the Cardinals' pennant chances—anything to avoid talking about our lost baby, anything to kill the silence that would have forced me to acknowledge the grief I couldn't understand, couldn't share. Peg didn't even pretend to respond. But as soon as we were in our kitchen, she picked up the phone.

"Who you calling, sweetheart?" I asked.

"June."

"Okay." I went to the refrigerator. "Want a sandwich?"

She paused, her finger hovering near the dial. "Rafael, will you please leave?"

"Okay."

I sat on the back-porch steps and brooded. I briefly considered trying to call my only living relative, my cousin Billy. I wasn't exactly sure where he was. Working construction in Los Angeles, last I'd heard. That was a couple of years ago—he could be anywhere. I was an investigator, I could probably locate him in an hour or two, but what would I say to him? My wife talked to her sister instead of me? Hurt my feelings? He'd laugh, and I wouldn't blame him. In

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Billy's world, in mine, men didn't have feelings that could be hurt, especially by women. Anger? Well, that was different.

So, over the next few months, I was almost constantly angry. Peggy didn't seem to notice. She was always on the phone with June, or her mother, or Peter. I'd come home to find her with a weak drink in one hand and the receiver in the other. She'd barely nod as I dumped a can of chili into a saucepan, she'd still be talking as I ate it with saltines, and talking more as I slumped in front of the television. She'd hang up and go to bed, and when I joined her the sheet between us would be as wide as a glacier. Once we came close to arguing, which would have been an improvement on our habitual silence. I'd found a charge for a call to Brooklyn on Ma Bell's bill, and when I demanded an explanation Peg said her brother had phoned long distance during an afternoon visit. While I was hesitating between conciliation and indignation, Peg quietly promised it wouldn't happen again.

Our mute hostility finally ended and I guess Peter's to thank for that. I came home late one night, nerves jangling from a nasty encounter with a client's husband, to find Peg's brother shambling down our front steps. Peter Schneider at age thirty-two was a lanky man with limp, shoulder-length blond hair thinning on top, a lazy smile, an habitual pallor. He was dressed, as usual, in grimy Marine fatigues, an unfiltered cigarette dangling from his lower lip. He gave me a two-fingered salute, winked, got into a white Chevy convertible I recognized as June's, and then, before I was aware of moving, I was in the living room raging at Peg.

I was furious, I was righteous. The release of the ugliness inside me was far sweeter than sex. Peter. I didn't want the son of a bitch coming around. He was a junkie and I had no use for him. Junkies were scum. I could forgive a man a lot of things, but not pumping that shit into his veins. Peter's heroin addiction wasn't his fault, Peg replied. It was a badge of heroism. No, I said, a year in Nam was no excuse for becoming a shiftless slob. Peg said I had no right to judge him—how could a man who put in his three years standing Shore Patrol duty at Great Lakes judge a man who'd crawled through a stinking jungle fighting Communists? Whose best friend had been blown to bits by a mortar? Screw that, I said, a lot of men were in Nam and damn few came back addicted. Only the punks. Only those looking for an excuse. It went on for hours, me stalking around the room clutching a beer, Peggy slumped in an easy chair with a bourbon and soda, the bottle at her elbow. Me yelling, Peggy

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speaking in a whisper with an edge of voice in it. Me slamming the door and later sleeping on the couch.

That fight, bad as it was, seemed to make things better between us for a while. Shrinks have a word: catharsis. We didn't go back to being love birds, but we did manage to be civil and even friendly and I began to think, What the hell, maybe this is marriage. Peg still hung on the phone, but she was conscientious about having dinner ready, asking about my work, scratching the erotic itch occasionally, performing the wifely rituals passed down through generations of Schneider women. She never mentioned her brother and I saw no signs that he'd been to see her.

The last real night of our marriage I'd gotten home at midnight. Manny Goldstein had demanded I type a report of a very long and boring surveillance, in the extreme detail our picky client wanted the next morning, and that had made me tired and irritated. But my mood changed when I found Peg waiting for me: she was my girl, my wife, and I realized that, despite everything, I loved her.

I kissed her and tasted the bourbon on her lips. Okay, she'd had a snort—no big deal. She had ham sandwiches and beer waiting in the kitchen. I told her about my day at Goldstein Investigations and asked her how her day had gone. She'd vacuumed the rugs, she said, and read a magazine, and watched the 4:30 movie on Channel 5, and phoned Junie, and in general been a good, dutiful housewife. Fine, I said, that's what she *should* be. I finished the snack, went into the bedroom, and searched the drawer of my bed table.

"Hey, gorgeous," I said. "I had a bunch of keys in here. You seen 'em?"

"What kind of keys?"

"To Wohowski's drugstore. Old Wally's been having break-ins—kids, probably. You remember, I promised him I'd check the place out before I go to bed."

"Not *tonight,* Rafael."

"Only take a minute."

Then I noticed the smell. Cigarette smoke. Very faint. Neither Peg nor I were smokers.

"Has he been here today?"

"Who?"

"You know who. Your brother. Peter."

"He did stop by—"

I was already pulling on my jacket as I confronted her. "Did you tell him?"

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"Tell him what, Rafael?"

"That I had the keys to Wohowski's?"

"You have no right to speak to me in that tone."

"Oh, shit." I spun and ran for the front door and toward the corner, knowing how it had gone—Peg gossiping about her detective husband helping his father's friend Wally, answering Peter's questions, speaking to him as he wandered from kitchen to bath to bedroom, trusting him, maybe pretending not to hear the drawer opening. Certainly not *wanting* to hear it. A hug and a peck to his cheek as he was leaving, a few desperate swallows of whiskey, and a careful avoidance of the table which had held the keys. Peg, the loving sister, willing and anxious to forgive, to ignore. What I don't know can't hurt me as an article of faith. I was furious.

For a few moments, I heard my shoe soles slapping the pavement, loud in the midnight stillness, the fury changing to a dull apprehension as I neared the squat, cinder-block building that was Wohowski's Pharmacy. I saw something that registered as wrong, but I was a second in realizing what it was. Wally's green Nash was parked at the curb. Wally's green Nash should have been eleven miles away, in the driveway of his suburban bungalow.

I slowed, looked, felt the apprehension increase. The entrance to the store was slightly ajar. I entered, paused, scanned the aisles and soda fountain, barely visible in the light from the neon Sealtest Ice Cream sign. Beyond them, at the rear, the prescription department was shadowed. I heard the grumble of a compressor and the tiny, odd creaks and scrapes I always heard in places that weren't usually quiet. Then I heard another sound, a snuffling. It scared me. I moved toward it too slowly—like Peg, postponing what I didn't want to find for as long as I could.

Wally Wohowski was sprawled on his back behind a counter, his white shirt the only thing I could see clearly in the almost total darkness. The snuffling was his breathing. I spoke his name and got no reply. I located his pulse—perceptible but erratic. My fingers came away wet. I groped, found a phone, called an ambulance and the cops.

After the paramedics had taken Wally, the cops and I examined the premises. Everything in the front of the store was in order, but the prescription department was a mess: glass cases smashed, bottles and boxes strewn all over the floor, and, as I expected, the safe that held the controlled substances gaping open and nearly empty. The cops thought the crime was drug-related. I thought so, too. I promised

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to dictate a statement at the local precinct in the morning—*later* in the morning—and left.

It was nearly four when I arrived at Peter's rooming house in an odd, semi-impoverished neighborhood near St. Louis University—not a slum, exactly, but not exactly anything else, either. Peter's room was empty. The closet door was open, as were the drawers in the single chest, and I flashed on Peter Schneider rampaging around St. Louis, flinging wide every orifice he could find, and that brief fantasy made me realize I was exhausted. For the pure hell of it, I went into the communal bathroom in the hall and saw, on the floor between the commode and the claw feet of the ancient tub, an empty syringe. Peter's spoor.

The bastard had a head start of at least two hours. It would take me at least that long again to check Union Station, the Greyhound depot, Lambert Airport, the car renters. So I wasn't likely to nail him by chasing him. But nail him I would—nail him to a wall and paint over him.

Driving home through the slowly waking city, I reconstructed it. After Peter had gotten the keys, he would have stayed in the neighborhood, in a bar maybe, until Wally closed at ten. He would have killed another hour to be safe, checked to be sure my car wasn't where I parked it, and then entered the store. Wally had returned unexpectedly—had forgotten something or was answering an emergency call from a customer—and surprised Peter trying to pry open the safe. Wally was feisty: he would have yelled at Peter, threatened him. But Wally was old, too. Peter would have easily overpowered him and then—I balked at imagining further. Peter had been on an interrogation team in Viet Nam. And I'd seen the mass of blood and bruise that had been Wally's face.

I dropped clothing on the floor near the bed, flopped next to Peg, and awoke in three hours refreshed. I was in my twenties and the adrenaline surged readily, particularly when I was challenged. Peg was pretending to be asleep; I could always tell when she was pretending.

With a cup of instant coffee in my hand, I rooted through our household papers, looking for the bill with the Brooklyn charge. I found it in the April envelope and copied the number in my notebook: new case, new page. I crumpled the bill and shoved it into a pocket, not consciously realizing at the time that I was preventing Peg from

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using the number to warn my quarry, Peter. Okay, I thought, I've got a start.

I glanced at my watch: 8:45—an hour later on the East Coast. I called a Manhattan agency we sometimes did business with and had one of their people use the reverse directory, the numbers-to-addresses version, and that gave me a street address and apartment. *Yeah, all right, I'm cooking, I'm happening.* But was that where Peter had run to, that place in Brooklyn? I asked the Manhattan operative to talk to a couple of neighbors of whoever lived there and find out if a large, shaggy blond man, probably dressed in fatigues, had been seen in the vicinity. The operative promised to get back to me in an hour. I hung up, leaned back in my chair, and sipped coffee as though it were something worth drinking. I guess I was smiling.

I became aware that Peg was in the doorway, arms folded, leaning against the jamb, her terrycloth robe pulled tight around her. Her lips were thin, her eyes heavy and dark, and I knew the next few minutes would be treacherous.

"Well." It was not quite a question.

"How much did you hear?"

"I heard you mention Peter's name."

"It looks like he beat up Wally Wohowski and stole some drugs. Maybe some money, too."

"That's a lie."

I felt myself losing control, but I had to react, anyway. "You're right, Peg. It *is* a lie. It doesn't *look like* Peter's guilty—it's certain."

The phone rang. I picked up and listened to Manhattan's report: a man fitting Peter's description had been seen entering an apartment complex on Sixty-eighth Street in Brooklyn fifteen minutes ago. *Yeah, all right, got the bastard pinned.*

"Why are you grinning?" Peg asked.

"No reason. Peg, I've got to go to New York." I brushed past her into the bedroom. "I shouldn't be gone long. A day—two at most."

I pulled the smaller suitcase from the closet shelf and began filling it.

"It's Peter," Peg said.

"Yeah."

"You don't have to do this."

"Yes I do."

"Why?"

"Because I'm responsible for what happened. I was supposed to

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help that old man, to protect him. And instead, I'm the reason he's in the hospital."

"Let somebody else do it."

"No, damn it, Peg, it's my job."

"You're going because you always have to prove something. Prove how tough you are, how smart you are."

There was a lot of truth in that. I continued packing. "Let's not discuss it, okay?"

"Big tough guy."

I flung a shirt into the suitcase. "Peg, if I don't bring him back, then everything I do is meaningless. Can you understand that?"

"No. I think it's baloney."

"Nothing I can say is going to change your mind."

"You wouldn't go if it wasn't Peter."

"I'd go if it was the Pope."

"You're jealous of him. He's the *real* tough guy. He's a hero. He fought and he suffered."

"Peg, your *hero* beat up a defenseless old man. Beat him up and stole from him. Come on, let's hear your excuse for that. —I'm waiting, Peggy."

"Do you think I love him more than you?" she asked suddenly.

"Now that you mention it, yeah."

"Maybe I do."

"Okay."

I lifted my gun from the top drawer of the dresser, a blue snub-nose .38 Smith and Wesson, and dropped it on top of the shirts.

"You're going to kill him, aren't you?"

"No."

"Then why are you taking that?"

I replaced the gun in the drawer. "Satisfied?"

"I may not be here when you get back."

"Suit yourself."

At the front door, I said, "I'm taking the car."

I drove. Illinois, Indiana, Ohio—zip zip zip. I could have caught a flight out of Lambert Field, but it was important to me to deliver Peter to the St. Louis police personally and I wasn't sure I could handle a prisoner on a plane. And the excitement of the chase demanded that I propel myself to where my quarry was. Three hours in an airplane would have been agony. Eighteen hours on the road wasn't bad.

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Actually, it took me a full day to arrive in Brooklyn. I'd lost almost six hours sleeping at a West Virginia truck stop when I realized that the highway was becoming a grey blur and I wasn't exactly sure where I was. Or who.

Brooklyn was a pleasant surprise. I'd expected a version of a Warner Brothers gangster-movie set and instead the parts of the borough I saw were a lot like South St. Louis—residential, tree-lined—except that there were large apartment buildings on every block. The address that went with the phone number Peter had called was on one of those buildings in a section identified on my map as Bay Ridge. It reminded me of a medieval fortress, a wall of windows broken by a sidewalk-level arch that opened onto a sort of square courtyard. The entrances—there were four of them—were inside the courtyard. I probably could have picked or jimmied a lock, or conned somebody into letting me in, but then what? I was completely unfamiliar with this style of architecture. How many possible escape routes were there? Back stairs? Fire escapes? Dumbwaiters? Direct assaults into alien territory are seldom successful.

I went into a candy store on the corner, to a pay phone, and dialed the number.

A woman answered.

"Lemme talk to Peter Schneider," I said.

"Nobody of that name here," she answered stiffly.

"Don't bullshit me, lady. Tell him Rafe Grogan."

I heard footsteps receding, heavier footsteps drawing near.

"Whaddaya want?" Peter demanded.

"Listen, I'm coming to see you. I'm at the airport, LaGuardia, waiting on a rental car. I should be there in an hour. Stay put. We got things to talk about."

"How'd you know where I am?"

"Tell you when I see you."

I hung up and sprinted to the courtyard. About five minutes later, Peter and a woman emerged from the door farthest away from the street. He was carrying his Marine duffel bag and she had a plaid overnight case.

"Hello, Peter," I said.

He turned and, after a second, swung the bag at me. I stepped back and let his momentum carry him around. Then I shoved him and he fell forward onto the grass. The woman stirred.

"Keep out of it," I told her.

Peter was trying to rise. "Stay put," I said. "We can play this two

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ways. I can call the cops and you go back to St. Louis in handcuffs or you can be nice and we ride back in my car. Your pick."

"Okay," he said. He rose, shouldered his bag.

"You don't have to be in this," I said to the woman. She didn't reply.

But she did follow us out to the car. I opened the passenger door and Peter tossed his bag inside.

The woman was standing nearby. I looked at her for the first time. She was thin, approaching an unhealthy middle age, dressed in jeans, sandals, a checked shirt. "Do yourself a favor," I said, and heard a faint click and sensed Peter moving. I glimpsed light from the street lamp rippling on polished metal in Peter's hand and twisted to the side. The knife blade scraped the front of my windbreaker. I jabbed awkwardly, off balance, with my left—a paw more than a punch—and struck his chest. Then I got a lot of hip, shoulder, and enthusiasm into a right that bounced his head off the roof of the car. He sat down in the gutter. I kicked the knife away and he keeled over.

"Hit him again," the woman said.

The intern at the emergency room of Victory Memorial Hospital diagnosed Peter's injuries as a fractured jaw and a concussion. I'd never punched anyone so hard before and I haven't since. I wonder what would have happened if I'd been carrying my gun.

The Brooklyn cops checked with the St. Louis cops, held Peter for extradition, and let me go after a lecture about cooperating with the authorities and a warning that I wasn't welcome on their turf.

I drove back to Missouri one-handed. The small knuckle of my right hand was swollen and throbbing.

I knew my house was empty the moment I entered, maybe because I was expecting it to be, but I shouted my wife's name, anyway.

Her note was on the bathroom mirror, scrawled in soap: *At Junes.*

I telephoned. "She don't want to talk to you," Junie said. "She's got a lawyer."

"Tell her I only did what I had to."

"Sure. He ain't your brother."

Peter returned to his hometown—in handcuffs, I guess—three days later. He was held in the city jail until Wally Wohowski was released from the hospital. The doctors said Wally had recovered, but they were wrong. He was broken. He sold the drugstore and

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spent the remaining eighteen months of his life hidden away in his house.

I visited him once. He refused to converse, just stared at a television game show. I left full of guilt, remorse, and a savage joy at the hurt I'd done Peter.

The public defender pleaded Peter guilty to assault and burglary—plea-bargained down from attempted murder—and a judge sentenced him to five years at the State Prison in Jefferson City, then, taking into account the defendant's distinguished military record, commuted the sentence to five years' probation. I thought, Give the son of a bitch a week and he'll be pumping shit into his veins again. I was wrong. Peter's probation officer worked what I considered to be a miracle and got him straight. He's apparently remained straight.

Peg and Junie came to the house Peg and I had shared the day Peter was released, to pick up Peg's clothes and household goods. Peg refused to look at me, to say anything.

I met her one last time. It was at nine on a sunny October morning in a courtroom. Her eyes were wide and shiny and she was swaying slightly. I could smell mouthwash and mints and I knew they were why I wasn't smelling gin.

"You people sure you want to go through with this?" the judge asked us, and I wanted to scream, *No, no, it's all a mistake.*

But instead I glanced at Peg and said, "Yes, your honor." Peg nodded.

"Okay."

The judge signed the divorce decree.

Side by side, as though we were best of friends, Peg and I walked out into the sunshine. We stood at the top of the courthouse steps. The day was warm, but there was a bite of autumn in the breeze and a few brown leaves were blowing across the lawn. "Well," I said. "We'll have dinner sometime."

That was when she said, "I hate you."

"Because of Peter?"

I'm not sure she heard me. She was already going down the steps, clutching the railing with both hands. She looked like an old woman.

I went in the opposite direction.

Because of Peter? I asked myself that question again and again over the years and never got an answer.

I was asking it as I drove away from the cinder-block building where I'd found a bleeding pharmacist that last night of my marriage

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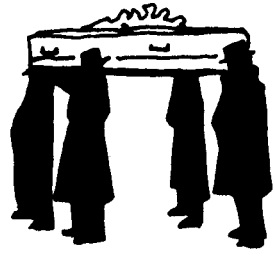
and still getting no answer. Snowflakes flared in the beams of my headlights and, on the interstate, gusts of wind rocked the car. Hostile weather, a real Missouri blizzard. I had a hundred long, hard miles ahead before I reached a warm room and the child I loved and suddenly I felt old and tired, and I wondered if the rewards were worth the journey, if any reward was ever worth the journey.



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RUBEN LOZA AGUERREBERRE

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In the August 1948 issue of EQMM, *Anthony Boucher's translation of Jorge Luis Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths" made publishing history—the first appearance of the extraordinary Argentinian writer's* ficciones *in English. The author of the following story, Ruben Loza Aguerreberre, its translator tells us, is a Uruguayan author and journalist who was a long-time friend of Borges. Borges knew of the story, was pleased by it, and on one occasion referred to it to the author as "our story" . . .*

THE MAN WHO STOLE FROM BORGES

by RUBEN LOZA AGUERREBERRE

Fate devises curious misunderstandings. The true story of Bernardo Arevalo was revealed to me long before he crossed the threshold of my home, when my eyes no longer could discern his features, the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December.

Bernardo Arevalo, a small man with carefully shaved pink cheeks and blue eyes, proper in every detail of his dress down to the habitual portfolio in his right hand, crossed the square at a quarter to eight and, standing at the counter of the bar, drank his coffee, paid with exact change, bowed in the doorway to no one in particular, and continued on his way. At five minutes before eight, his heels re-

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sounded in the long hallway of the Municipal Library. He greeted a fellow employee and sat down to read the newspapers, waiting until someone (generally a retired person, a student, or a youngster now and then) required his services. When this occurred, he was a happy man: he gave unhesitatingly of all that lay within the reach of his memory—which was close to prodigious—with a permanent smile on his lips. He had read many books—his head was an orderly index file of a wide variety of authors and titles. He also had fixed preferences. Should a reader ask him for literary orientation, he would end up carrying off under his arm Volume One of *Don Quixote, The Shape of Things To Come* by H. G. Wells, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T. E. Lawrence in the old Ercilla editions, or, if not, any book by Borges—in particular, his *Ficciones*. And he would then return to the half shadow of the quiet and solitary reading room and exhaust his eyes deciphering tiny letters on yellowed pages.

Bernardo Arevalo lived with his mother. His father left one winter morning for the tailor shop and never returned. Bernardo was five years old when that happened. His mother shed not a single tear. She sold a small ranch she had inherited from her grandmother to the people who were renting it and gave herself over to pedaling, day and night, a large, dark, heavy sewing machine, seated next to the window that looked out on the patio. At dusk she added the feeble glow of an oil lamp.

Years went by. Bernardo began working as an errand boy at the National Library. Every Christmas Eve, his aunt and uncle arrived from the country, and a little after midnight they left. They would take the boy's head in their large hands and kiss him noisily and smile with a certain air of nostalgia and then would depart amid the din of the skyrockets and fireworks.

When Bernardo was forty-one, Emma, his mother, died. He was, it should be understood, a solitary man living a simple life—now he was even more alone. Emma's death altered his routine, but he soon recovered it, feeling free of any grief—a situation that at night would sink him into painful introspection. However, he would invariably end up reading a few pages from his night-table books: *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, The Aleph*, and *Ficciones*.

The worst part was nightfall, which seemed to last much longer than in previous summers. Bernardo would leave the library with the sun still high and quiet hours still ahead. One afternoon, on opening the window onto the patio, lightheaded with the sweet

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aroma of jasmine, he saw, or thought he saw, his mother, Emma, picking flowers alongside the lime tree.

What was there for him to do? He would come home and, after bathing, wind the pendulum clock in the living room, feeling a secret desire for time to pass quickly.

In the protracted early hours of a morning in late November, lying sleepless in bed, Bernardo devised a plan for his approaching vacation. Now that he was alone, he could attempt a few days away from Montevideo—perhaps even out of the country, possibly even as far as Buenos Aires. Why not? And maybe even see Borges.

Seated on the bed, he laid out his trip, day by day, hour by hour. For weeks thereafter, he thought of little else. (Following that morning, he slept every night through, except for one Sunday morning when he dreamed of tigers, or pumas, who were pursuing him.) In every spare moment he reread Borges' poetry, which he was far less familiar with, preparing himself for his encounter. He imagined the two of them posing for a photograph while people passing by looked at them.

There were a few problems with his vacation leave, which was postponed for a few days, but finally, on the twenty-first of December, he left for Buenos Aires. In his inside coat pocket, he carried the calling card of a writer from Montevideo who frequented his library, addressed to Borges' friend, Ulyses Petit de Murat, who would clear the way for Bernardo to meet Borges.

On the afternoon of December twenty-fourth, Borges received him in person. "If you're from Uruguay you're welcome," the writer said, holding out a tremulous hand. Bernardo had never felt so moved. "Ulyses spoke to me about you this morning," the writer added as he made his way back to the living room without the help of his cane. He oriented himself so effortlessly, Bernardo found it hard to believe he could see nothing.

They sat down and talked for some ten minutes. Borges recalled some impressions of Uruguay—a rainbow in Paso Molino, the traditional entryways of Montevideo homes, the clear waters of the Arapey River where one summer morning he swam with Enrique Amorim. Borges' monologue was interrupted by two people from a television station who came to ask him for a Christmas message. In his bland and impersonal voice, the writer said two or three things Bernardo judged as perfectly appropriate and then agreed to step out on the balcony for a closing film shot with the outspread city as the backdrop.

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This lasted for a while. Among the books located to Bernardo's right were a few pale sheets he picked up with a trembling hand, as if he were stealing money. He glanced at a few paragraphs and recognized Borges' minuscule handwriting. He felt a chill course through him.

When their voices announced their return, Bernardo slipped the pages into his pocket, trembling like a leaf. When the television journalists took their leave, Bernardo did also.

"I must go, maestro," he said. Reaching out for an armchair with an open hand, Borges asked him if he would like to take some tea. Bernardo shook his hand and holding it in his said, "Maestro, I'll go down with the others. It's getting late and today I return to Uruguay. It has been a privilege to meet you and to shake the hand that you write with."

"Uruguay," repeated Borges. He then recited a few verses of Emilio Oribe. "Have a safe trip," he said, standing in the doorway. The old writer's smile, brighter than his gaze, lit up his face.

At home in the solitude and the cover of darkness of his bedroom the following night, Bernardo read Borges' manuscript.

At first it was hard for him to decipher the meticulous hand of the nearly blind writer, with its stubby strokes in the p's and b's. Then he was finding detached words that didn't quite make sense or seem appropriate. Before reading further, he paused to pour himself another drink from the bottle of whiskey he had brought from Buenos Aires. Seated on his bed near an overhead night lamp, he read the opening sentences: "Fate devises curious misunderstandings. The true story of Bernardo Arevalo was revealed to me long before he crossed the threshold of my home, when my eyes no longer could discern his features—"

With his brow bathed in perspiration, Bernardo read all four pages. The story of the thief dreamed up by Borges was unfinished. The last words of the manuscript were these: "Now drunk, he went out into the patio of his house, beneath a starry sky. He felt serene and happy; he had not been so for years. He took a long drink, the last one, and threw the empty bottle far away. Stumbling over the raised flowerbeds in the patio, he untied the clothesline and began knotting it, as his eyes sought out the highest sturdy limb of the lime tree."

—translated by Donald A. Yates

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first publication in the U.S.

Paul's loss of speech was the hardest for Gwynneth to bear. She hated being cut off from his thoughts. He was unable even to write, or draw pictures. She had to be content with scraps of communication. Each time he came up from the beach he handed her something he had found, a shell or a pebble. She received such gifts as graciously as she had once accepted roses . . .

THE WASP

by PETER LOVESEY

The storm had passed, leaving a keen wind that whipped foam off the waves. Heaps of gleaming seaweed were strewn about the beach. Shells, bits of driftwood, and a few stranded jellyfish lay where the tide had deposited them. Paul Molloy, bucket in hand, was down there as he was every morning, alone and preoccupied.

His wife Gwynneth stood by the wooden steps that led off the beach through a garden of flowering trees to their property.

"Paul! Breakfast time!"

She had to shout it twice more before Paul's damaged brain registered anything. Then he turned and trudged awkwardly toward her.

The stroke last July, a few days before his sixty-first birthday, had turned him into a shambling parody of the fine man he had been. He was left with the physical coordination of a small child, except that he was slower. And dumb.

The loss of speech was the hardest for Gwynneth to bear. She hated being cut off from his thoughts. He was unable even to write, or draw pictures. She had to be content with scraps of communication. Each time he came up from the beach he handed her something he had found, a shell or a pebble. She received such gifts as graciously as she had once accepted roses.

They had said at the hospital that she ought to keep talking to

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him in an adult way even if he didn't appear to understand. It was a mistake to give up. So she persevered, though inevitably it sounded as if she were addressing a child.

"Darling, what a beautiful shell! Is it for me? Oh, how sweet! I'll take it up to the house and put it on the shelf with all the other treasures you found for me—except that this one must stand in the center." She leaned forward to kiss him and made no contact with his face. He had moved his head to look at a gull.

She helped him up the steps and they started the short, laborious trek to the house. They had bought the land, a few miles north of Bundaberg on the Queensland coast, ten years before Paul retired from his Brisbane-based insurance company. As chairman, he could have carried on for years more, but he had always promised he would stop at sixty—before he got fat and feeble, as he used to say. They had built themselves this handsome retirement home and installed facilities they'd thought they would use: swimming pool, jacuzzi, boat house, and tennis court. Only their guests used them now.

"Come on, love, step out quick," she urged Paul, "there's beautiful bacon waiting for you." And, tirelessly trying for a spark of interest, she added, "Cousin Haydn's still asleep by the look of it. I don't think he'll be joining you for your walks on the beach. Not before breakfast, anyway. Probably not at all. He doesn't care for the sea, does he?"

Gwynneth encouraged people to stay. She missed real conversation. Cousin Haydn was on a visit from Wales. He was a distant cousin she hadn't met before, but she didn't mind. She'd got to know him when she'd started delving into her family history for something to distract her. Years ago, her father had given her an old Bible with a family tree in the front. She'd brought it up to date. Then she had joined a family-history society and learned that a good way of tracking down ancestors was to write to local newspapers in the areas where they had lived. She had managed to get a letter published in a Swansea paper and Haydn had seen it and got in touch. He was an Evans also, and he'd done an immense amount of research. He'd discovered a branch of his family tree that linked up with hers, through Great-Grandfather Hugh Evans of Port Talbot.

Paul shuffled toward the house without even looking up at the drawn curtains.

"Mind you," Gwynneth continued, "I'm not surprised Haydn is used to staying indoors, what with the Welsh weather *I* remember. I expect he reads the Bible a lot, being a man of the cloth." She

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checked herself for speaking the obvious again and pushed open the kitchen door. "Come on, Paul. Just you and me for breakfast by the look of it."

Cousin Haydn eventually appeared in time for the midmorning coffee. On the first day after he'd arrived, he'd discarded the black suit and dog-collar in favor of a pink T-shirt. Casual clothes made him look several years younger—say, forty-five—but they also revealed what Gwynneth would have called a beer gut had Haydn not been a minister.

"Feel better for your sleep?" she inquired.

"Infinitely better, thank you, Gwynneth." You couldn't mistake him for an Australian when he opened his mouth. "And most agreeably refreshed by a dip in your pool."

"Oh, you had a swim?"

"Hardly a swim. I was speaking of the small circular pool."

She smiled. "The jacuzzi. Did you find the switch?"

"I was unaware that I needed to find it."

"It works the pumps that make the whirlpool effect. If you didn't switch on, you missed something."

"Then I shall certainly repeat the adventure."

"Paul used to like it. I'm afraid of him slipping, so he doesn't get in there now."

"Pity, if he enjoyed it."

"Perhaps I ought to take the risk. The specialist said he may begin to bring other muscles into use that aren't affected by the stroke—isn't that so, my darling?"

Paul gave no sign of comprehension.

"Does he understand much?" Haydn asked.

"I convince myself he does, even if he's unable to show it. If you don't mind, I don't really care to talk about him in this way, as if he's not one of us."

Cousin Haydn gave an understanding nod. "Let's talk about something less depressing, then. I have good news for you, Gwynneth."

She responded with a murmur that didn't convey much enthusiasm. Sermons in church were one thing, her kitchen was another place altogether.

It emerged that Haydn's good news wasn't of an evangelical character. "One of the reasons for coming here—apart from following up our fascinating correspondence—is to tell you about a mutual ancestor, Sir Tudor Evans."

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"*Sir* Tudor? We had a title in the family?"

"Back in the Seventeenth Century, yes."

"I don't recall seeing him on my family tree."

Haydn gave the slight smile of one who has a superior grasp of genealogy. "Yours started in the 'seventeen eighties, if I recall."

"Oh, yes."

"To say that it started then is, of course, misleading. Your Eighteenth Century forebears had parents, as did mine—and they in turn had parents. And so it goes back—first to Sir Tudor, and ultimately to Adam."

"Never mind Adam. Tell me about Sir Tudor." Gwynneth swung around to Paul, who was sucking the end of his thumb. "Bet you didn't know I came from titled stock, darling."

Haydn said, "A direct line. Planter Evans, they called him. He owned half of Barbados once, according to my research. Made himself a fortune in sugar cane."

"Really? A fortune. What happened to it?"

"Most of it went down with the *Gloriana* in 1683. One of the great tragedies of the sea. He'd sold the plantations to come back to the land of his fathers. He was almost home when a great storm blew up in the Bristol Channel and the ship was lost with all hands. Sir Tudor and his wife Eleanor were among those on board."

"How very sad!"

"God rest their souls, yes."

Gwynneth put her hand to her face. "I'm trying to remember. Last year was such a nightmare for us. A lot of things passed right over my head. The *Gloriana*. Isn't that the ship they found—those treasure hunters? I read about this somewhere."

"It was in all the papers," Haydn confirmed. "I have some of the cuttings with me, in my briefcase."

"I do remember. The divers were bringing up masses of stuff—coins by the bucketful, and silverware and the most exquisite jewelry. Oh, how exciting—can we make a claim?"

Cousin Haydn shook his head. "Out of the question, my dear. One would need to hire lawyers. Besides, it may be too late."

"Why?"

"As I understand it, when treasure is recovered from a wreck around the British coasts, it has to be handed over to the local receiver of wrecks or the Customs. The lawful owner then has a year and a day to make a claim. After that, the pieces are sold and the proceeds go to the salvager."

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"A year and a day," said Gwynneth. "Oh, Haydn, this is too tantalizing. When did these treasure hunters start bringing up the stuff?"

"Last March."

"Eleven months! Then there's still time to make a claim. We must do it."

Haydn sighed heavily. "These things can be extremely costly."

"But we'd get it all back if we could prove our right to the treasure."

He put out his hand in a dissenting gesture. "*Your* right, my dear, not mine. Your connection is undeniable, mine is very tenuous. No, I have no personal interest here. Besides, a man of my calling cannot serve God and mammon."

"Do you really believe I have a claim?"

"The treasure hunters would dispute it, I'm sure."

"We're talking about millions of pounds, aren't we? Why should I sit back and let them take it all? I need to get hold of some lawyers—and fast."

Haydn coughed. "They charge astronomical fees."

"I know," said Gwynneth. "We can afford it—can't we, Paul?"

Paul made a blowing sound with his lips that probably had no bearing on the matter.

Gwynneth assumed so. "What is it they want—a down payment?"

"A retainer, I think is the expression."

"I can write a check tomorrow if you want. I look after all our personal finances now. There's more than enough in the deposit account. The thing is, how do I find a reliable lawyer?"

Haydn cupped his chin in his hands and looked thoughtful. "I wouldn't go to an Australian firm. Better find someone on the spot. Jones, Heap, and Jones of Cardiff are the best in Wales. I'm sure they could take on something like this."

"But is there time? We're almost into March now."

"It is rather urgent," Haydn agreed. "Look, I don't mind cutting my holiday short by a few days. If I got back to Wales at the weekend I could see them on Monday."

"I couldn't ask you to do that," said Gwynneth in a tone that betrayed the opposite.

"No trouble," said Haydn breezily.

"You're an angel. Would they accept a check in Australian pounds?"

"That might be difficult, but it's easily got around. Traveler's

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checks are the thing. I use them all the time. In fact, if you're serious about this—"

"Oh, yes."

"You could buy sterling traveler's checks in my name and I could pay the retainer for you."

"Would you really do that for me?"

"Anything to be of service."

She shivered with pleasure. "And now, if you've got them nearby, I'd love to have ten minutes with those press cuttings."

He left them with her, and she read them through several times during the afternoon when she was alone in her room and Paul had gone for one of his walks along the beach. Three pages cut from a color supplement had stunning pictures of the finds. She so adored the ruby necklace and the gold bracelets that she thought she would refuse to sell them. Cousin Haydn had also given her a much more detailed family tree than she had seen before. It proved beyond doubt that she was the only direct descendant of Sir Tudor Evans.

Was it all too good to be true?

One or two doubts crept into her mind later that afternoon. Presumably the treasure hunters had invested heavily in ships, divers, and equipment. They must have been confident that anything they brought up would belong to them. Maybe her claim wasn't valid under the law. She wondered also whether Cousin Haydn's research was entirely accurate. She didn't question his good faith—how could one in the circumstances?—but she knew from her own humble diggings in family history that it was all too easy to confuse one Evans with another.

On the other hand, she told herself, that's what I'm hiring the lawyers to find out. It's their business to establish whether my claim is lawful.

There was an unsettling incident toward evening. She walked down to the beach to collect Paul. The stretch where he liked to wander was never particularly crowded, even at weekends, and she soon spotted him kneeling on the sand. This time he didn't need calling. He got up, collected his bucket, and tottered toward her. Automatically she held out her hand for the gift he had chosen for her. He peered into the bucket and picked something out and placed it on her open palm.

A dead wasp.

She almost snatched her hand away and let the thing drop. She

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was glad she didn't, because it was obvious that he'd saved it for her and she would have hated to hurt his feelings.

She said, "Oh, a little wasp. Thank you, darling. So thoughtful. We'll take it home and put it with all my pretty pebbles and shells, shall we?"

She took a paper tissue from her pocket and folded the tiny corpse carefully between the layers.

In the house she unwrapped it and made a space on the shelf among the shells and stones. "There." She turned and smiled at Paul.

He put his thumb on the wasp and squashed it.

"Darling!"

The small act of violence shocked Gwynneth. She found herself quite stupidly reacting as if something precious had been destroyed. "You shouldn't have done that, Paul. You gave it to me. I treasure whatever you give me. You know that."

He shuffled out of the room.

That evening over dinner she told Cousin Haydn about the incident, once again breaking her own rule and discussing Paul while he was sitting with them. "I keep wondering if he meant anything by it," she said. "It's so unlike him."

"If you want my opinion," said Haydn, "he showed some intelligence. You don't want a wasp in the house, dead or alive. As a matter of fact, I've got quite a phobia about them. It's one of the reasons I avoid the beach. You can't sit for long on any beach without being troubled by them."

"Perhaps you were stung once."

"No, I've managed to avoid them, but one of my uncles was killed by one."

"Killed by a wasp?"

"He was only forty-four at the time. It happened on the front at Aberystwyth. He was stung here, on the right temple. His face went bright red and he fell down on the shingle. My aunt ran for a doctor, but all he could do was confirm that Uncle was dead."

Clearly the tragedy had made a profound impression on Haydn. His account of the incident, spoken in simple language instead of his usual florid style, carried conviction.

"Dreadful. It must have been a rare case."

"Not so uncommon as you'd think. I tell you, Gwynneth, the wasp is one of God's creatures I studiously avoid at all times." He turned

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to Paul and for the first time addressed him directly, trying to end on a less grave note. "So I say more power to your thumbs, boyo."

Paul looked at him blankly.

Toward the end of the meal Haydn announced he would be leaving in the morning. "I telephoned the airport. I am advised I can get something called a standby. They say it's better before the weekend, so I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" said Gwynneth, her voice pitched high in alarm. "But you can't. We haven't bought those traveler's checks."

"That's all right, my dear. There's a place to purchase them at the airport. All you need to do is write me a check. In fact, you could write it now in case we forget in the morning."

"How much?"

"I don't know. I'm not too conversant with the scale of fees lawyers charge these days. Are you sure you want to get involved in expense?"

"Absolutely. If I have no right to make a claim they'll let me know, won't they?"

"I'll let you know myself, my dear. How much can you spare without running up an overdraft? It's probably better for me to take more rather than less."

She wrote him a check for ten thousand Australian dollars.

"Then if you will excuse me, I'll go and pack my things and have a quiet hour before bedtime."

"Would you like an early breakfast tomorrow?"

Haydn smiled. "Early by my standards, yes. Say about eight? That gives me ample time to do something I promised myself—try the jacuzzi with the switch on. Goodnight and God bless you, my dear. And *you,* Paul, old fellow."

Gwynneth slept fitfully. At one stage in the night she noticed that Paul had his eyes open. She found his hand and gripped it tightly and talked to him as if he understood.

"I keep wondering if I've done the right thing, giving Haydn that check. It's not as if I don't trust him—I mean, you've got to trust a man of God, haven't you? I just wonder if you would have done what I did, my darling—giving him the check, I mean—and somehow I don't think so. In fact, I ask myself if you were trying to tell me something when you gave me the wasp. It was such an unusual thing for you to do. Then squashing it like that."

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She must have drifted off soon after, because when she next opened her eyes the grey light of dawn was picking out the edges of the curtains. She sighed and turned toward Paul, but his side of the bed was empty. He must have gone down to the beach already.

She showered and dressed soon after, wanting to make an early start on cooking the breakfast. She would get everything ready first, she decided, and then fetch Paul from the beach before she started the cooking.

However, this was a morning of surprises.

For some unfathomable reason Paul had already come up from the beach without being called. He was seated in his usual place in the kitchen.

"Paul! You gave me quite a shock," Gwynneth told him. "What is it? Are you extra hungry this morning or something? I'll get this started presently. Would you like some bread while you're waiting? I'd better give Cousin Haydn a call first and make sure he's awake."

It crossed her mind as she went to tap on Haydn's door that Paul hadn't brought her anything from the beach. She wondered if she'd hurt his feelings by talking about the wasp as she had.

She didn't like knocking on Haydn's door in case she was interrupting his morning prayers, but it had to be done this morning in case he overslept.

He answered her call. "Thank you. Is there time for me to sample the jacuzzi?"

"Of course. Shall we say twenty minutes?"

"That should be ample."

She returned to the kitchen and made a sandwich for Paul. The bucket he always took to the beach was beside him. Without being too obvious about it, Gwynneth glanced inside to see if the customary gift of a shell or a pebble was there. It was silly, but she was feeling quite neglected.

Empty.

She said nothing about it, simply busied herself setting the table for breakfast. Presently she started heating the frying pan.

Fifteen minutes later when everything was cooked and waiting in the oven, Haydn had not appeared. "He's really enjoying that jacuzzi," she told Paul. "We'd better start, I think."

They finished.

"I'd better go and see," she said.

When she went to the door, the leg of Paul's chair was jammed

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against it, preventing her from opening it. "Do you mind, darling? I can't get out."

He made no move.

"Maybe you're right," Gwynneth said, always willing to assume that Paul's behavior was deliberate and intelligent. "I shouldn't fuss. It won't spoil for being left a few minutes more."

She allowed another quarter of an hour to pass. "Do you think something's happened to him? I'd better go and see, really I had. Come on, dear. Let me through."

As she took Paul by the arm and helped him to his feet, he reached out and drew her toward him, pressing his face against hers. She was surprised and delighted. He hadn't embraced her once since the stroke. She turned her face and kissed him before going to find Cousin Haydn.

Haydn was lying face down on the tile surround of the jacuzzi, which was churning noisily. He was wearing black swimming-trunks. He didn't move when she spoke his name.

"I think he may be dead," Gwynneth told the girl who took the emergency call.

The girl told her to try the kiss of life, an ambulance was on its way.

Gwynneth was still on her knees trying to breathe life into Cousin Haydn when the police arrived. They had come straight round the back of the house. "Let's have a look, lady," the sergeant said. Then, after a moment: "He's gone—no question. Who is he—your husband?"

She explained about Cousin Haydn.

"This is where you found him?"

"Well, yes. Was it an electric shock, do you think?"

"You tell me, lady. Was the jacuzzi on when you found him?"

"Yes." Gwynneth suddenly realized it was no longer running. Paul must have switched it off while she was phoning for help. She didn't want Paul brought into this. "I don't know. I may be mistaken about that."

"There could be a fault," the sergeant speculated. "We'll get it checked. Is your husband about?"

"He was." She called Paul's name. "He must have gone down to the beach. That's where he goes." She told them about the stroke.

More policemen arrived, some in plainclothes. One introduced himself as Detective Inspector Perry. He talked to Gwynneth several

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times in the next two hours. He went into Cousin Haydn's room and opened the suitcase he had packed for the flight home. He turned to Gwynneth and smiled.

"You say you knew this man as Haydn Evans, your cousin from Wales?"

"That's who he was."

"A distant cousin?"

Gwynneth didn't care for his grin. "I can show you the family tree if you like."

"No need for that, Mrs. Molloy. His luggage is stuffed with family trees, all as bogus as his Welsh accent. He wasn't a minister of any church or chapel. His name was Brown. Michael Herbert Brown. An English con man we've been after for months. He was getting too well known to Scotland Yard, so he came out to Queensland this summer. He's been stinging people for thousands with the treasure-hunting story. Here's your check. Lucky escape, I'd say."

They finally took the body away in an ambulance.

Detective Inspector Perry phoned late in the afternoon. "I just thought I'd let you know that your jacuzzi is safe to use, Mrs. Molloy. There's no electrical fault. I have the pathologist's report and I can tell you that Brown was not electrocuted."

"What killed him, then?"

He laughed. "Something rather appropriate. It was a sting."

Gwynneth frowned and put her hand to her throat. "A sting from a wasp?"

"In a manner of speaking." There was amusement in his voice. "Not the wasp you had in mind."

"I don't understand."

"No mystery in it, Mrs. Molloy. A sea-wasp got him. You know what a sea-wasp is?"

She knew. Everyone on the coast knew. "A jellyfish. An extremely poisonous jellyfish."

"Right, a killer."

"But the man didn't swim in the sea. He kept off the beach."

"That explains it, then."

"How?"

"He wouldn't have known about the sea-wasps. That storm washed quite a number onto the beaches. It looks as if Brown decided to take one look at the sea before he left this morning. He'd put on his swimming gear—and he must have waded in. Didn't need to go far.

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There were sea-wasps stranded in the shallows. You and I know how deadly they are, but I reckon an Englishman wouldn't. He got bitten, staggered back to the house, and collapsed beside the jacuzzi."

"I see." She knew it was nonsense.

"Try and remember, Mrs. Molloy. Did you see him walk down to the beach?"

"I was cooking breakfast."

"Pity. Where was your husband?"

"Paul?" She glanced over at Paul, now sitting in his usual armchair with his arms around his bucket. "He was with me in the kitchen." She was about to add that Paul had come up from the beach, but the inspector was already onto other possibilities.

"Maybe someone else saw Brown on the beach. I believe it's pretty deserted at that time."

"Yes."

"Be useful to have a witness for the inquest. All right, I heard what you said about him normally keeping off the beach, but it's a fact that he died from a sea-wasp sting. That's been established."

"I'm not questioning it."

"I ask you, Mrs. Molloy, how else could it have happened? There's only one other possibility I can think of. But how could a jellyfish get into a jacuzzi, for Christ's sake?"

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Good mysteries come in all lengths, from short-short stories of under a thousand words to (in rare cases) supernovels of 200,000 words or more. In recent years, the standard mystery was around 60,000 words, but the current trend is to longer books, especially when the author is being groomed to "break out" into bestsellerdom. In many cases, the added length is a mistake—certainly, most 300-page mysteries would be more effective if cut by a quarter to a third. Perversely, however, my own picks for the two best mystery novels of 1987, both now in paperback—Scott Turow's courtroom bestseller *Presumed Innocent* (Warner, $4.95) and Jonathan Kellerman's third novel about child psychologist Alex Delaware, *Over the Edge* (Signet, $4.95), are both of much greater than average length and justifiably so.

The length that has fallen farthest from favor in recent years is the novelet, roughly ranging from 12,000 to 30,000 words. Rex Stout, Hugh Pentecost, Philip Wylie, Kelley Roos, and their colleagues in *American* and other bygone slicks showed this to be an effective length, but it is rarely seen any more. A recent collection by Joseph Hansen, one of the top writers in the field, shows how unfortunate this neglect of the novelet is.

*** Joseph Hansen: *Bohannon's Book*. Foul Play/Countryman, $16.95. The five adventures of Hack Bohannon, horse-ranch owner and semi-reluctant private eye on California's northern coast, show what a fully plotted, economically told mystery can be presented in about 12,000 words. All the stories have appeared previously in either *EQMM* or *AHMM*, and they are good to have in book form.

*** Gerald Petievich, *Shakedown*. Simon and Schuster, $16.95. In his first book since *The Quality of the Informant* (1985), former Treasury agent Petievich once again gives a strong sense of the-way-it-really-is among the feds and the crooks. Main characters this time are Edward Sands, ex-con, ex-cop, and master shakedown artist, and FBI agent John Novak, who wants to use Sands to go after Mafia figure Tony Parisi. The writing, dialogue, construction, pace, and Southern California and Las Vegas locales are all admirable.

*** Elizabeth Peters: *The Deeds of the Disturber*. Atheneum, $16.95. The adventures of Victorian feminist Amelia Peabody, her archaeologist husband Radcliffe Emerson, and their precocious offspring Ramses are always delightful, though their fifth adventure, based in London rather than Egypt, is not quite up to earlier entries. As always, there is a multilayered plot satisfactorily resolved and many in-jokes for mystery buffs, including references in situations and character names to Wilkie Collins,

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Conan Doyle, H. Rider Haggard, and Sax Rohmer.

*** Robert Irvine: *Baptism for the Dead.* Dodd, Mead, $15.95. Can a non-Mormon named for the angel Moroni function as a private eye in Salt Lake City? Moroni Traveler is an intriguing character, and his relationship with an old friend who is an official of the L.D.S. church, together with an intricate plot and a knowledgeable view of a city not overused in detective fiction, make this a new series to watch. As R.R. Irvine, the author writes about TV newsman Bob Christopher, most recently in *Ratings Are Murder* (Walker, 1985).

*** Robert Campbell: *Thinning the Turkey Herd.* New American Library, $16.95. Chicago precinct captain Jimmy Flannery's fourth case is as well told and colorfully cast as his previous. The turkeys of the title are neither literal gobblers nor contemptible people, but beautiful young women who come to the big city looking for modeling work, some of them dying well before their time. There are plenty of real animals in this book, however, including exterminator Willy Dink's varied group of ratcatchers and a dog named Alfie the softhearted Flannery rescues from the pound.

*** Bill Crider: *Cursed to Death.* Walker, $16.95. In the third book of another notable new series, small-town Texas sheriff Dan Rhodes faces the problem of a vanished dentist who has recently been the target of a local witch's curse. Despite its spring publication date, this is a Christmas mystery and its humor and humanity suit the season well.

** Lilian Jackson Braun: *The Cat Who Had 14 Tales.* Jove, $2.95. Reporter Jim Qwilleran and feline sleuth Koko of the author's novels don't make even a token appearance in this collection, which is more accurately a gathering of charmingly told cat stories than of mysteries. Not surprisingly, those published in *EQMM* tend to be the best as well as having the most criminous content.

** Robert B. Parker: *Crimson Joy.* Delacorte, $16.95. Boston private eye Spenser seeks a serial killer of black women who may be one of Susan Silverman's patients. Better than last year's very tired *Pale Kings and Princes,* this one is still thinly plotted with much padding, posturing, and superficial psychology, along with the bits of pointed description, social observation, and humor that make Parker worth reading despite everything.

** Claire McNab: *Lessons in Murder.* Naiad Press, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302, $8.95. Here is a low-key classical mystery as traditional in its elements as could be imagined—interesting background (a Sydney, Australia, high school), varied cast of suspects (the faculty), unusual weapon (a shop-class power drill), and real detection, complete with alibis, timetables, and speculation. Traditional, that is, except for the romance between the chief police investigator and one of the suspects, in this case both women. This first novel is not outstanding, but it is competently written and

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crafted. Future cases of Inspector Carol Ashton will be worth watching for.

Among the recent reprints are some of 1987's more interesting novels: Barbara Paul's *A Chorus of Detectives* (Signet, $3.50), in which fascinating real-life characters and background (Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, and the Metropolitan Opera circa 1920) make up for a notably silly mystery plot; Stephen King's extraordinary *Misery* (New American Library, $4.95), a memorable novel of pure suspense with some fascinating material on the process of writing alongside the customary gross-outs; William Marshall's *Frogmouth* (Mysterious Press, $3.50), from the remarkable series about Hong Kong's Yellowthread Street cops, compelling as ever, if a little too confusing and surrealistic for top marks; and Harold Adams' *The Barbed Wire Noose* (Mysterious Press, $3.95), a Carl Wilcox novel by another of the field's most individual stylists—the small-town Depression-era atmosphere is expertly conveyed.

One of the most exciting byproducts of the recent bull market in mystery fiction has been the revival of good books long out of print. It's hard to believe William Campbell Gault's 1962 novel, *County Kill* (Charter, $2.95), one of the best of the Brock Callahan series, has never before appeared in paperback. The first book to take place in Brock's current hometown of San Valdesto (i.e., Santa Barbara), the book introduces one of the best of the author's many strong female characters: Mexican bar proprietor Juanita Rico, who provides drugs to the already addicted in order to keep the Anglo pushers from getting rich and creating new addicts.

Quite different but equally fine is Henry Cecil's *According to the Evidence* (Academy Chicago, $4.95), a 1954 entry that presents the master of British courtroom comedy in peak form. In thirty-plus years of mystery collecting, I've never before run across *any* edition of Stuart Palmer's 1932 Hildegarde Withers novel, *Murder on the Blackboard* (Bantam, $3.50), a most enjoyable example of the Golden Age puzzle, American-style, with the interesting background of a New York grade school and a good measure of the humor its author was famous for.

Two of the genre's most knowledgeable fan/scholars, Douglas G. Greene and Robert C. S. Adey, have edited a notable new anthology. *Death Locked In* (International Polygonics, $12.95) is a generous (533 pages) collection of 24 locked-room mysteries, including both the expected (from Carr, Chesterton, Queen, Rawson, Boucher, Hoch, Pronzini) and the less so (from Nicholas Carter, Wilkie Collins, and L. Frank Baum).

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a distinguished reprint by

LORD DUNSANY

At the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1909, William Butler Yeats produced Lord Dunsany's first successful play, The Glittering Gate*—a fantasy about two dead burglars who realize they can't get into heaven in the usual fashion and so jimmy the gates. Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, was born in London in 1878 of Irish parents. The first nine of the twenty-six stories in his* The Little Tales of Smethers and Other Stories *are accounts of how Mr. Linley solves unusual crimes, by Smethers, a simple-minded relish salesman. One of the nine tales, of course, is the classic "Two Bottles of Relish." "The New Master," which follows, is another classic from this author's monumental imagination . . .*

THE NEW MASTER

by LORD DUNSANY

I cannot prove my case. I have been over everything very carefully. I have had a talk with a lawyer about evidence in coroner's courts, without letting him know what I was really after. And after long consideration I have decided to give no evidence at all, or as little as I can. This will mean that my friend Allaby Methick will be found to have taken his own life, and no doubt they will say that his mind was temporarily deranged. If they do call me, I shall do all I can to imply that he suffered from undue mental stress. That is all I can do for him. I know that I shall be sworn to tell the whole truth. But what is the use of that if no one will listen? And I might even be considered deranged myself.

The whole truth is this. Allaby Methick and I belonged to the Otbury Chess Club. It is not a chess club that anyone ever heard of

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more than ten miles away—knowledge of the hamlet of Otbury would go little farther than that. We used to play often on summer evenings, sitting down in the Otbury schoolroom (which the chess club hired for its use) when the blackbirds were going to sleep, and playing on till the nightingales in briary thickets at the top of the down were all in full song.

Methick lived about a mile on one side of Otbury and I only a little more than that on the other. Except on the rarest occasions, I used to beat Methick. But that never deterred him from coming to have a game with me whenever I asked him to. And the cheerful resignation with which he lost never varied.

There were not many other members of the Otbury Chess Club who ever turned up, so Methick and I played a great deal together. And then one evening, as I entered the little schoolroom and found Methick already there, instead of sitting down on a bench at the long table before a board with the pieces already set up, he broke out with the words: "*I have something that will beat you.*"

"A problem, you mean?" I said.

"No," he said. "Come and see. It's at my house. We can have supper there."

Almost before I answered, he was striding out of the schoolroom, not literally dragging me with him, but somehow the result was the same.

"What is it?" I asked, as he walked by a sheep track over the downs. Methick was too excited to explain the thing very thoroughly, but at any rate he made it clear that it was a machine of some sort.

He lived alone in this little house of his, except for a charwoman who came in every day and helped in the kitchen, but he did most of his own cooking. He had some invested capital; but something had made him decide that it was better not to keep capital frozen, so he spent some of it every year on his simple needs, and, finding that he had £1,000 to spare, he decided to spend it on chess, for the good reason that chess was what he enjoyed most. "But how on earth," I broke in, "can you spend a thousand pounds on chess?"

"A machine," he said.

"A machine?" I repeated.

"Yes," he said. "It can play chess."

"A *machine?*" I said again.

"Yes," he said. "Haven't you heard?"

And then I remembered that there once was a machine—before

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the turn of the century, wasn't it?—that was said to have been able to play chess, and I mentioned this to Methick.

"Oh, that," he said. "That was a very simple affair. My machine can beat you."

"I should like to see it," I said.

"I'll show it to you," said Methick.

"Does it know the regular openings?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It plays queer openings."

"I hardly think it will beat me," I said, "if it doesn't know the standard openings."

"It will," he said. "Its openings are much better than ours."

Of course that seemed to me nonsense, and I said little more. There was no need to argue with him, I thought, for the game itself would prove my point more clearly than I could say it. And chess players seldom argue, you know—just as heavyweight boxers do not slap each other's face when they chance to meet. The ring waits to test them.

We went through Methick's small garden and into his house, and there in his sitting room was a strange machine. At first I thought it was a very fine radio or television set, and then I remembered what I had been brought to see. Long arms of flexible steel lay folded in pairs in front of it. I could see it might require two arms for castling, but I could not see what need it would have for more. I asked Methick.

"It is simpler," he explained. "They cover all parts of the board, and one of them is for removing captured pieces."

But I soon lost interest in the steel hands and turned in wonder to that astonishing iron brain, which answered every move and made calculations that I soon saw were beyond me. For Methick put me at once in a chair at the table, whose top was a chessboard with squares of boxwood and ebony. Each square in the board had a small hole, into which fitted a metallic stud at the bottom of each chess piece, but what arrangement of wires was underneath the squares I had, and still have, no idea. The vast brain before me was hidden, as human brains are hidden, though instead of skull and skin it was walnut that concealed it from the eye.

But to the ear it was plain enough that there was something intricate there, for the moment I made a move a faint humming arose, as though innumerable wires were singing to themselves. And often, as I made a move, their tone would suddenly change, so that I knew I was faced by some active and vital thing that was

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actually thinking. I wanted to look into its face, but the polished walnut prevented any glimpse of that.

It felt queer to sit opposite an active and powerful intelligence without ever being able to see its eyes or its face or anything but a smooth panel of walnut. It felt even queerer not to be able to get some insight into its character—as you are able to do sometimes with human beings—from its long and delicate hands. There were ten of them at the ends of the long athletic arms, hands no wider than silver forks but very flexible. With these, it moved its pieces, or grabbed those it captured.

For the benefit of chess players, I may say that I opened with the king's gambit, and the machine responded with something like the Cunningham defense, but it wandered away into variations that I had never seen or read about. Every move of mine produced an answering change in the tune the machine was humming—if you can call it a tune—and Black's move came so quickly that, whatever process of thought there was among all those wires, it must have been instantaneous: not like the slower process of our reasoning, but something like our instinct.

I learned from that first game something new in the intricacies of the Cunningham gambit, but I learned something else—something even beyond the wisdom of that machine. I learned of its petulance and bad manners. For as the machine began to win, which it did after half an hour, it began to slam down its pieces. I scarcely noticed it at first, so absurd it seemed, but soon it was unmistakable that the machine was frivolously exhibiting a silly and ostentatious triumph. So this was what Allaby Methick had in his house: a mind greater than man's—at any rate, greater than mine—but a tawdry and vulgar mind. And the thought suddenly came to me: if it behaves like that when winning, what would it do if it lost?

Then Methick played the monster (or whatever you care to call it), with the hospitable intention of putting me at my ease by letting me see that I was not the only person to be beaten by a machine.

It soon beat Methick, slamming its pieces down at the end with an even more vulgar display of its sensitive flexible arms than it had shown to me, and humming in a contented way that suggested an absurd self-satisfaction. Methick opened a cupboard then and brought out a decanter and two tumblers, and we both had some Irish whiskey.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked in a glowing voice, and

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I praised his wonderful machine as well as I could. But Methick sensed that my praise, which ought to have come so easily, was being held back. In the end he got it out of me: the intellect of the thing was amazing, but what of its character?

"Character?" said Methick.

"Yes," I said. "Do you like having it in the house?"

He got my point then. "Yes," he said. "It's showy and vulgar, but I don't mind that. It's the intellect I got it for."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, of course. But sooner or later doesn't one come up against the other thing, if it's there?"

"Its vulgarity, you mean?" said Methick.

"Exactly," I said.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Methick. "I am interested only in its intellect."

I didn't say any more. You don't decry a treasure that your host shows you, especially when you have seen nothing like it before and are not likely ever to be able to afford such a thing yourself. So I said no more about it. But now I wish I had.

I went home soon after that second game, pondering as I walked along the slope of the downs. On those downs were often found some of the earliest of the crude axe-heads with which man had slowly won his victory over the beasts—until, aided by grimmer weapons, he had obtained dominion over the world, which he had held for what seems to us a long time. Now something was loose that was mightier than man. I saw that machines were already becoming the masters, taking from man his domination over the earth. Wherever I looked, I saw clear signs of it. It was no consolation to reflect that man himself had made the machine. Its origin didn't matter—only that it was mightier than its creator. Labor-saving devices have been ousting men from employment for the past fifty years, and influencing their ideas, until there is scarcely a house in the civilized world that has no fancies in the permanent form of metal—fancies no longer of man but of the machine.

And now, to reveal what I had long suspected, this chess-playing machine, for all its vulgarity, was a power superior to us. Had we had our day, I wondered? The megatherium, the mammoth, and all the great lizards had had theirs. Was man's turn coming, too?

When I reached home I forgot these gloomy thoughts, but they remained at the back of my mind. And when a day or two later I

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went over to Otbury again and saw Methick at the chess club at our usual hour, they all awoke and troubled me once more.

Something of these gloomy fears I almost conveyed to Methick, but, whether he listened or not, he was too preoccupied with the wonder of his mechanical thinker to appreciate what I was trying to indicate.

"The machine," he said, "is playing an entirely new opening. Of course it is too good for me, but it ought to be shown to the masters. I don't believe anything like it has ever been played."

"Yes," I said. "But don't you think it is a pity to let something like that get too clever for us?"

"I think the masters ought to see it," he said.

I saw then that we were on different sides. He wanted to show what his wonderful machine could do. I wanted to see man hold his place, a place that no machine should be able to usurp.

It was no use to say any more. We had both lost interest now in playing each other, but Methick asked me to come to his house again, and this I gladly did, for the more uneasy I became the more I wanted to see how far the machine had got. I had always felt we could hold our own against everything but thinking, but now this machine was a deeper thinker than we. There was no doubt of it. There is nothing I know in the world that is a surer test of sheer intellect than the chessboard. Here men argue, and how often one finds that none of them can express what he really means. At strategy, which so closely resembles chess, men have made resounding names for themselves, but the purity of that art is too often spotted and flawed by chance—while strategy is the test of power, it does not quite equal chess as a test of the intellect. So as I walked in silence beside Allaby Methick over the mint and thyme of the downs, I was even more deeply a prey to these fears.

When we got to Methick's little house and went into the sitting room, there was the monster, concealed by its walnut panels, sitting before the chess table. On the table was a strip of paper such as chess players use to record a game, and two sharp pencils, and a knife that had lately been used to sharpen them, with the blade still open and pencil marks on the blade. The steel hands of the machine were folded and idle.

"Look here," I said to Methick, "I don't want to interfere—but do you quite trust that machine?"

"Why not?" he asked.

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"It's cleverer than we are," I said.

"Oh, yes," he said, taking an obvious pride in it.

"Well," I said, "supposing it should get jealous."

"Jealous?" said Methick.

"Yes," I said. "There are two kinds of jealousy. One is wholly despicable, resenting all superiority. People suffering from that kind would hate an archbishop for his sanctity. But there is another kind with which it might be easier to sympathize—the kind that does not like inferiority, and cannot tolerate it when it is in power. Suppose the machine should ever feel that way? Look at all we've got, and it has nothing. Look at all we can do, and it can only sit there and play chess when you put out the pieces. A mind like that, compelled to play second fiddle! Do you think it would like it?"

"I suppose not," said Methick.

"Then why leave that knife where it can reach it?" I said.

Methick said nothing, but he removed the knife. I couldn't say any more, because I saw that Methick did not like my interference. So I sat and watched him play, man against machine, and saw man being beaten. Again I saw that vulgar display of unseemly triumph, and once more I wondered what the machine would do if it lost.

"Would you care to play?" asked Methick. I said I would, and sat down and played against the monster. I took no interest in its opening, or in any of its play as such, but I watched its speed, its forestalling of all my plans, and its easy victory. Methick must have seen that I was annoyed with his pet, and may have thought that it was because I had been beaten. Whatever his reason, he put the chessmen away and placed a portable radio on the table and turned it on.

We got some gentle music that Beethoven had written for a lady named Elise, which was a very pleasant change from the noisy exultations of the triumphant machine. I saw from the way Methick had handled the radio, almost from the way he looked at it, that music was now a secondary interest in his life. Chess was the first, and his grim machine gave that to him; next was the concert halls of the world, to which his little portable radio was a doorway.

When the music was over, he opened the back of the radio and took out from it what is called a wet battery—a rectangular glass jar full of a dark-green liquid—and looked at it with the care that a hunting man will give to his horse's food. Like many a man living alone, he used only one table for everything, and he tended the needs of his radio on the same table on which he played chess with the

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monster. He always drank coffee while playing, and his cup rested on the unoccupied corner nearest him.

Cheered by the music that Methick had so thoughtfully turned on, I said good night and walked home in the calm of an evening that was glowing with early stars. I will not say that I do not mind being beaten at chess, for there is nobody who does not really mind. But I will say that my defeats at chess were not the principal reason for my reluctance to visit Methick again. The principal reason was my dislike of sitting in front of something that was gloating all the time over its intellectual superiority, and which, as soon as the course of the game made that superiority evident, manifested its insolent delight as offensively as it could. If Methick was willing to put up with it, let him, but for myself I kept away.

I had other interests, of course, besides chess and music and Methick. I am married. But my wife is not interested in chess, and I doubted being able to tell her about that machine in such a way that she'd have believed me.

Nearly every evening, at the time that I used to play chess with Methick at Otbury, I would think of him. But I felt sure that he would not come to our little chess club any more, that he would be playing with his machine. At sunset I would especially think of him, finding in that ominous look that sometimes comes over the hills as the sun goes down a certain harmony with the feelings I had about Methick.

One day, as the sun was setting, I said to my wife, "I must go over and see Methick."

She said, "You have not been playing chess with him lately."

I said, "No. That is why I must go."

So I walked over the slope of the downs, as moths were sailing abroad, and came to Methick's gate. I walked through his garden, found his door ajar, and went in. And there was Methick at the table—but he was not playing chess. His portable radio was on the boxwood and ebony squares, with the jar of green acid near it, and Methick was doing something or other to the radio's works.

"Not playing chess?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "The B.B.C. are doing the whole of Beethoven's concertos. It's the *Emperor* tonight. I can't miss that. I can play chess any time."

"Look here," I said. "You don't imagine that machine of yours could ever be jealous of the time you devote to your wireless set."

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"Jealous?" he said.

"I've seen a dog jealous of a cat," I replied. "And a dog is nothing, intellectually, compared to that machine. It's got a nasty sort of a character, you know."

"There you go again," said Methick. "It's a wonderful machine. It cost me all that money, and you practically tell me I've wasted it. And why? Because it beat you at chess."

"No, it isn't that," I said.

"Why, then?" he asked.

I couldn't explain. Perhaps I ought to have. But it wouldn't have been easy.

"Have another game with it," Methick suggested, more to stop me from arguing with him than for any other reason.

"No, thanks," I said. "You have a game with it."

And he did. I lifted the radio off the table, but neither of us troubled to move the battery. Methick set up the chess pieces and sat down, his usual cup of coffee next to him.

He made the first move, which set everything in motion, and the machine answered. And then I witnessed a most astonishing thing: the monster, that brilliant intellect, that master chess player, began making silly moves.

Its first move, which I record for the benefit of chess players, was Pawn to Queen's Rook's fourth, and its second was Pawn to King's Rook's fourth. The machine had evidently lost its temper. It was sulking.

After those first two petulant moves, it settled down to play properly, and a very interesting game resulted. But the machine did not seem to play with its usual speed.

Methick won. How it happened, I never quite knew. It isn't easy at chess, no matter how good one is, to recover from two bad moves, yet I think the machine did. The solution to the mystery—how a master mind could be beaten by a poor player—was suddenly revealed to me when Methick exclaimed, just as he won, "I forgot to oil it!"

I was the last man who saw Methick alive, and so I must attend the inquest.

He died of poison. Sulphuric acid, which he drank with his coffee. There is no doubt of that. Is it any use my telling this story in court? Will the coroner or his jury believe that one machine could be jealous

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of another machine, and angry at not having been given its due ration of oil?

Will they believe that one of those steel arms reached out while Methick was not looking, picked up the jar of acid, and quietly tipped some into his coffee?

I think not. Nobody would believe that.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MURDER IN THE LAB

by MARGUERITE BURANELLI

They talk of a robot named Dan—
A scientist, best in the land.
He worked night and day
Till success came his way
And he triumphed, inventing a man.

But victory was far from complete.
Fellow robots, in tones none too sweet,
Said, "This guy with a brain
Puts most robots to shame—
He could make us all obsolete."

And so, in the dark of the night,
With the scientist nowhere in sight,
They did in his friend—
'Twas an untimely end,
And progress was set back a mite.

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After two decades, Terry Mullins, whose first published story this is, resigned as an editor of adult-educational materials—on New Year's Day 1988—and began to concentrate on writing. His other interests include philosophy, archaeology, chess, and ethnology. His writing style is refreshingly direct and spare, and while Mr. Mullins has put the editing of educational materials behind him, his story is an education in matters of the heart.

Matt Solon looked like a redneck Southerner, large, tough, and a little past middle age. "What is this Dash," he asked Vera, "a rabbit or a skunk . . .?"

A RABBIT OR A SKUNK?

by TERRY MULLINS

She had been numb during the long weeks of the trial, numb right up to the moment when the judge sentenced him to die. Until then, she had hoped the jury would see the truth. She had contained her anger in the superstitious hope that if she were nice they would be nice, too. But the jury found him guilty and the judge passed the death sentence, and her anger flared hot and unrestrained.

She screamed. Then she stood on her chair and looked for Dash. But he was not in court. She left the courtroom and went to his house, where they told her Dash had left Camden. She didn't believe them, but there seemed nothing she could do about it: to the months of frustration was added this helplessness.

That afternoon, she visited Jim in jail. He said his attorney was appealing the verdict. They both knew that would be useless. Their only hope was Dash.

"How can I find him, Jim? What can I do?"

"I don't know, Vera. If I couldn't get him to tell the truth, and if the police couldn't get him to tell the truth, and if our lawyer couldn't

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get him to tell the truth after swearing on the Bible, what can you do?"

"I've got to try," she said. "I've got to come face to face with him and make him tell the truth. I've got to try."

"Yes," Jim told her, "you try."

But Dash had left. His woman said he'd gone South—somewhere near North Carolina, but she didn't know just where. He was hiding until Jim was executed. Then he figured he'd be free and no one would try to make him tell the truth.

A haggard Vera searched the face of Dash's woman and asked her, "Did he tell you he lied?"

"No, but I could tell. I can always tell when Dash is lying. And he was lying when he said it was Brutus who was with him the night Clarence killed Laval. I could tell he was lying. It was Brutus and Clarence who killed Laval, I know that. And I'm sure it was your husband who was with Dash in the restaurant when the killing took place."

"Why did Dash lie?"

"I don't know why he lied—especially to stand up in court and lie. But I know he lied."

"I've got to find him. He's our only hope."

"You sure are pretty hopeless if Dash is your only hope," she said.

"You said North Carolina. Where?"

"I don't know. He didn't say anyplace. He just said South. But once before he went down South and sent me a postcard with a picture on it. The picture said Charlotte."

"Did you keep the card?"

"It was a long time ago. But in those days I kept near everything about Dash—maybe I kept it. Come on upstairs. I've got a suitcase full of old junk. It might be there."

And there it was, a cheap, colored postcard with a picture of the Shriner's Club in Charlotte on one side. It had been mailed from Kings Mountain. All it said was "I miss you, honey. I'll be home soon."

That was all they could get out of it—a postmark, a picture, and eight words written in childish block letters. Vera stared as if to make it talk.

"How long you got?" Dash's woman asked her.

"About a month—maybe more if the court considers Jim's appeal. But maybe not. Maybe just a month."

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She packed that night. Then she sat on the edge of the bed and wondered how a black woman who had never been in the deep South could track down a black man who had lived there and probably had relatives there.

When she talked to Jim about it, he tried to cheer her up. "Don't worry," he said. "You've worked in Paris and Geneva. You made your way around in Marseilles and Rome. You never had any trouble. This is your own country. You'll do okay. I just hope Dash is there and you find him." They sat in quiet despair for long moments. Then he said, "Bertha Smith is from North Carolina. See her. Maybe she can help."

As it turned out, Bertha was from Charlotte and knew a family from near Kings Mountain. "They belong to my church," she said. "Let's see them right away. You got your work cut out for you, but we'll help you all we can."

Two days later, Vera found herself in Kings Mountain explaining to a white taxi driver that she wanted to go to a farm about three miles outside of town down a country road past an abandoned cotton gin. To her surprise, the directions made sense to him and half an hour later they pulled up to a mailbox with the name MOSES CLAY written on it. The ruts that led to the house didn't look fit for a taxi, so she paid the driver and carried her suitcase in by herself.

An old man sat gently rocking on the front porch, toothlessly chewing and looking straight ahead. He paid her no notice, even when she greeted him. Someone was coming around the side of the house, however—a thin man with a big smile. "Sorry," he said, "I saw the taxi and knew it must be you, but I was ankle-deep in pig slop." He held out a newly washed hand. "I'm Moses Clay. You must be Vera Westhover. This is Grandad," he said with a gesture toward the old man. "He don't say much. Prudence is in the field. She'll be here soon. Let me take your bag up to your room."

She settled into a large room with three chairs, a bureau, and a large wooden bed with a solid cotton mattress. Prudence came up and welcomed her. Then she was left alone until supper.

At supper she found the ham, grits, spinach, and boiled potatoes surprisingly good. But her eating was hampered by having to tell an enthralled audience all about how Clarence and his brother Brutus had killed Laval. Clarence had been positively identified and had confessed and been sentenced to be executed, but he had sworn it was Jim and not Brutus who was with him. Dash had been with

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Jim in a restaurant when the killing occurred and could have given him an alibi, but he said it was Brutus who was with him. The waitress said she couldn't recognize anyone but Dash. So Jim had been convicted.

They hung on every word. "And now you think Dash is around here. How do you look to find him?"

"I thought I'd go around the bars in Kings Mountain and show people his picture and ask if anyone has seen him."

They didn't like the idea at all.

"You go tell the police first, honey, and then we'll start going to church meetings. There are three this week. Don't you try looking for Dash in bars."

"Look," Vera said, "I know Dash. He won't be in any church—he'll be in a bar somewhere. Still, I'll go to the police first thing in the morning."

The police captain listened to her story, looked at the pictures of Dash she had brought, and called in Detective Matt Solon. "Do what you can for her," he said.

Solon was white. He looked like a redneck Southerner, large, tough, and a little past middle age. But it turned out he was from up North. He was friendly, said he wasn't sure he could help much, and insisted that Vera stay out of bars. "That's one thing I can do," he said. "I can ask in the bars and I can keep an eye on the local newspapers. You go to church meetings and read local news in the *Charlotte Observer*—also situations-wanted ads and personals. But don't you try to cover the bars."

She told him she wasn't afraid—something that was only half true—and that she had less than a month now to save her husband, but he insisted he could cover the bars better and faster than she could, and as part of his routine. He couldn't very well cover an African Baptist prayer meeting inconspicuously, she could. Then he asked:

"What is this Dash, a rabbit or a skunk?"

"What do you mean?"

"With a rabbit, you make as much noise as you can and hope to scare it out into the open. With a skunk, you do all you can to keep from scaring it."

"He's a skunk. If he knows I'm after him, I'll never find him."

"Okay. We'll ask about any strangers who have come here lately.

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You can show his picture, but I'd better not. I don't want his friends to know I'm interested."

Vera relaxed a bit. She was getting more help than she had expected. "The captain said you're from up North," she said.

"That's right. I'm from Jersey, too—from Newark."

"What are you doing down here?"

"I was with the Newark Police. A couple of my buddies and I sold numbers—mostly for the fun of it and to get to know the people. A white cop in a black neighborhood needs something to bring him into contact with the people. I was fired. My wife is from Charlotte, so we packed up the kids and came South. They needed a good man here and hired me."

"Have you read about the Laval killing?"

"Yes. Frankly, I thought they had a pretty good case against your husband."

"Clarence knew he was bound to be convicted, but he tried to save his brother by saying it was Jim who was with him. Dash could have proved it wasn't Jim, but somebody paid him. I want to make Dash tell the truth."

"Well, finding him is the first step. We'll see what we can do about that."

The rest of the week plunged Vera into a world she had never known. She had never been a great churchgoer. Mostly she and Jim had gone to an interracial Lutheran church a couple of blocks from where they lived. But that was at Christmas and on one particularly memorable Easter.

The Clays were Baptist and their friends included Pentecostals and Methodists. The meetings were loud, friendly, exciting, and all black. The small country churches seemed to hold suppers somewhere every night. There was a healing and a prayer meeting. Moses and Prudence asked everyone in sight if any stranger had come into the community lately. For a small rural community, there were a lot of visitors, but they all turned out to be cousins, nephews and nieces, and a few grandchildren of people who lived there.

Detective Solon had a different list. Strangers in Kings Mountain were fairly conspicuous and he tracked them down easily, but again they were not Dash. The police in Gastonia thought he was not there, either.

They kept it up for another week before Vera began to feel dis-

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couraged. It seemed possible that Dash hadn't come into this area at all. "What if he went to Charlotte?" she asked Solon.

"Then you might as well give up. Let's face it, all we can be sure of is that he left Camden and that he's not in Kings Mountain. He could still be in the county, of course—after all, not everyone associates with church people. But you've got to face the fact that he might just have gone to Philadelphia."

"I can't look everywhere. His woman knows him pretty well and she thinks he would have come here."

"She may not know him as well as she thinks she does," the detective said. "I'll keep asking as I go about my work. You keep going to church meetings. It seems the only course."

The following Tuesday halfway through supper, the phone rang. Prudence rose to answer it and Moses and the old man stopped eating and listened.

"It's for you!" Prudence shouted to Vera. "It's the police!"

Vera jumped up from the table and rushed for the phone. It was Solon. "Have you found him?" she asked.

"Yes. He's been living with an uncle in Hell's Back Yard. I'll come over tonight and tell you all about it, all right?"

"Fine."

Solon drove his own car, pulled it into the driveway enough to be out of the road, and walked up to the house. Vera introduced him to the Clays and they all went into the dining room and sat around the table—except for the old man, who stayed watching television.

Solon placed a large newspaper clipping on the table. "This," he said, "is a feature story one of the young reporters for a Gastonia paper did. It's called 'The Cigarette Machine' and it's about a man who came here a couple of weeks ago and just sits beside a pond and smokes cigarettes all day. There are no pictures, but I thought it sounded as if it could be Dash, so I went out there to that pond and kept out of sight.

"It's the man in your pictures, all right. He had a thermos of coffee and two cartons of cigarettes beside him. There was a brown paper bag, too, so I guess he carries his lunch with him. I suppose he thought he wouldn't attract much attention just keeping to himself, but according to this article half the school children in the neighborhood watch his every move. They call him the cigarette machine and bet on how many packs he'll smoke each day—usually six or seven, but one day he smoked as high as ten. He goes to the pond

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about ten o'clock, sits under a pine tree, and smokes until five-thirty. Then he picks up his cigarettes and thermos and leaves. The pond is a stagnant pool in Hell's Back Yard and the irony is that it's only about three quarters of a mile from here. Here I've been looking all over Kings Mountain and you all have been covering this whole part of the county."

Tears rolled down Vera's face. "So we found him," she said. "We really found him." She turned to Solon and said, "Thank you."

He rose, looking a bit embarrassed. "I wish you luck," he said. "I hope you can talk him into telling the truth. I suggest you go down to the pool about eleven tomorrow morning. There's less chance he'll run away from you if you give him a while to get settled into his routine."

Vera agreed and Solon gave her directions to the pond, shook hands all around, and left.

Thinking about the next day's encounter, Vera found it hard to pull herself together. She had been concentrating all her energy on finding Dash. Now that was done and she had to think of what to say to him, she felt weak.

The next day, she walked to the cluster of shacks called Hell's Back Yard and down a weedy path to the pond. It was a small pond with a half rotten pier jutting a few feet out into cattails. A grove of jack pines surrounded it and Dash sat under one of these about six feet from the pier, his back against the pine. As she watched, he finished a cigarette, lit another from it, and flipped the first into the pond, where it joined several hundred other filtertips sodden with green algae.

"Dash!" she called in as steady a voice as she could manage. He mumbled an oath and jumped up.

"Vera, what you doing here?"

"I came to talk with you, Dash. You've got to tell the truth. You've got to tell the police Jim was with you when Laval was killed."

"You come a long way for nothing if that's what you want. I told the police and I told the court it was Brutus with me and I'm not changing nothing."

"Why did you lie, Dash?"

"I got paid plenty to save Brutus. His momma gave me a thousand dollars, all in hundred-dollar bills. I never saw ten one-hundred-dollar bills before, all clean and crisp and just out of the bank. They was beautiful."

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"But they'll kill Jim if you don't tell the truth."

"I'm sorry about that, but it's your problem. I'm going to keep out of everyone's way until Jim is dead. Then they'll close the case and I can enjoy my money—enjoy spending it the way I've enjoyed counting it."

"You're not out of everyone's way. I've found you."

"I've told what I had to tell and I got by with it. The waitress knew me, but she didn't know Jim. As long as I say it was Brutus with me, no one can say it wasn't. That's how it is and that's how it's going to stay."

"I say it's not. I'm going to make you tell the truth."

"You never should've left Camden, Vera. Nobody knows you're here and nobody will miss you." He was standing now, a square, mean man looking at her with hatred.

"Everybody in this county knows me now, Dash. Even the police know me. And they all know why I'm here."

"I don't believe you. You can disappear into this pond and no one'll ever know what happened." He came toward her and she stood too weak from fear to move.

"Put your hands up, Dash!" The voice came from beside the pier. Matt Solon, a pistol pointed at Dash, came slowly forward.

Dash couldn't believe it. For a long moment he stood slack-jawed, staring at Solon. Then he cursed and looked from Solon to Vera.

"Turn around. Put your hands behind your back."

Dash faced the man, but he put his hands behind his neck.

Solon walked toward Dash, holding the gun slightly forward but not braced for firing. "Not behind your neck, behind your back. And turn around." His left hand moved to his pocket and brought out a pair of handcuffs.

Dash put his hands behind his back but seemed tensed to spring either for Solon or Vera. Then his nerve failed him and he turned around.

Solon snapped the handcuffs on. "Mrs. Westhover, you'll find my car in the shed across the road a little ways from where the path begins. Wait for us there. If there are any kids around, chase them away."

Vera stared at him. He smiled. "You didn't think I'd let you meet the man totally unescorted, did you?" he said. "Go on. I've got to get the tape recorder from under the pier. Then we'll be along."

As Vera started up the path, she heard him reading Dash his rights.

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Up until his senior year in high school, Buddy had planned to follow in his father's footsteps by joining the Marines. But that was before Buddy met this little girl, Beverly, who lured him off to another trail.

Another story about a father-son relationship gone awry, but for a different reason . . .

LIKE FATHER, OR ELSE

by DAVID PIERCE

Buddy was my only son, my only child. His momma had breathed her last breath about the same time he'd breathed his first and I'd do anything in this world to help him. So why did my hands tremble so much as I dialed the telephone? Fresh soil was still on my palms and under my nails. Need to wash up, I thought as a woman's voice startled me.

"911. Can I help you?"

"Yes," I answered quickly, believing in my heart this was the right thing to do. "I'd like to report a murder."

I blamed Buddy for my soiled hands and the fact that I had to rap his girl friend Beverly on the back of the head so hard that the life had flown out of her before she'd hit the floor.

Buddy used to be such a good son—before he met that girl friend of his. When he was a boy we used to go fishing and hunting year round and to the auto races every Saturday night. As he grew older, we worked on cars together. He was only twelve when he changed his first full set of brake shoes on a '64 Impala. Together we watched old war movies with all our favorite actors: Audie Murphy, John Wayne, Lee Marvin. Sometimes I'd tell him stories of my Marine days and Buddy'd sit on the edge of his seat, hanging onto every word I said. He worshiped the ground I walked on then.

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Up until his senior year in high school, Buddy had planned to follow in my footsteps by joining the Marines. Good, I told him. A man needs discipline in his life. He needs to learn how to follow orders, to respect authority, and to take command of a situation. I was proud of my son then.

That was before Buddy met this little girl, Beverly, who lured him off to another trail, far from my worn path. She talked him into going to college with her. How are *they* going to teach you to be tough? How are *they* going to teach you to be a man? I asked him. And for the first time ever he told me to mind my own business. Maybe he thought by telling his old man to mind his own business, *that* made him a man—he didn't need the Marines *or* me.

Okay. I lived through that and so did Beverly. Only because he hadn't entirely slipped away from me, though. Sometimes when he'd come home on weekends we'd do a valve job on a junker I was rebuilding or swap out a transmission, talking cars and running to the fridge and getting beers for one another whenever we went dry.

Then one day he comes home from college with a notebook full of poems he said he'd written and wanted me to read them. *Poems?* He tried to make it sound okay by telling me there was one poem about cars with me and him in there. Hell, I've always had too much grease on my hands to try to turn the pages of any book. It'd been years.

And just because I didn't read the silly poems, he slipped further away from me and closer to that girl.

I didn't dare tell him I used to do stupid things like that, too. Yeah, I used to write these really gushy letters to Buddy's momma way before she ever consented to anything. They probably weren't that good, mostly about the same thing: love, soft skin, fresh smell. Kind of stupid. But they got the job done. Just a natural knack, I guess, that Buddy must have picked up. I just hoped it would pass away with him like it did with me.

I knew college wouldn't make him a man. He wasn't even man enough to tell me himself what he was planning to do for a living once he got that damned degree. A wimpy-voiced *professor* called me one day and said that William (his name's Buddy!) was going on a reading circuit for about three months, that he'd be traveling from city to city reading *poems!* He said I should be proud of William because he was such a fine poet. Can you believe that? Changing brake shoes at twelve years old and he winds up writing poems to put food on the table.

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And then I found out that this girl friend of his was living with him as if she was his wife. Can you believe *that?* Not even man enough to tie the knot and ask for his old man's blessings. I guessed they just sat around the house all day making up rhymes and reading poems to each other.

A couple of days ago I was rebuilding a carburetor and I got to remembering how close Buddy and I used to be and it hit me like an open-handed, roundhouse slap: *Buddy needed me.* I had to help him. So I dug up one of the phonebooks that the phone company sends me every year but I hardly ever use, and thumbed through probably a thousand pages until I found Buddy's name (only the phone company called him William, too). I wrote down the address and then took a couple of hours and a few sheets of notebook paper and, calling on what I thought was a long-lost knack, put together a plan that I believed would save Buddy.

The next day I drove to his house and waited across the street in my truck. Before too long Buddy came out (wearing a suit!) and got into a little *foreign* car. I'd have forgiven him had it been a Ford, but a foreign car! Now I was fuming, and that ruinous woman was still inside.

After Buddy drove away, I grabbed a shovel from the back of my truck, stormed into the house without knocking, and hit that crazy Beverly in the back of the head when she tried to run away. She never hurt at all. They taught us that kind of stuff in the Marines. Then I carried her out back into the coziest little back yard, closed in with a six-foot privacy fence, and dug a hole in no time at all for that little gal. For Buddy's sake, I only hoped I hadn't acted too late. How much of a Chevy-289 block had he forgotten?

"I'm sorry, sir, but what makes you think there's been a murder?" the 911 voice asked.

"Because I did it," I told her. "I buried her in the back yard. But I can't stand it, so—I'm confessing." I had to hold the receiver with both hands and my voice trembled nearly as bad. I figured the cops would find the shovel I'd tossed in Beverly's marigold bed, they'd find a pair of Buddy's sneakers with fresh soil on them in his upstairs closet, they'd find some new love letters in Beverly's underwear drawer from a man named Harold, and they'd figure someone just got jealous and offed her. Buddy might even notice a few grease smudges on a page or two that'd mean nothing to the police, but Buddy would know. And he'd only know that I was trying to help.

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"What is your name, sir, and your address?" 911 asked.

Maybe a stint in prison would turn Buddy back down the right path, teach him something about authority, discipline, and being tough. Sure, the Marines were great for me, but it was those five years I spent in prison for killing my first wife and my best friend Harold after I'd found out they'd been messing around that made me the man I am today.

"My name's Buddy, B-U-D-D-Y," I said, and gave her the address, hung up the phone, and left. I'd go visit Buddy next week, maybe take him a car magazine to read.

DETECTIVERSE

YOUR WE-HOPE-NOT-TYPICAL CONNOISSEUR

by ANDREW J. BURTON

A pistol's far too noisy
And poison's not my style,
A knife is often messy
And beating's not worthwhile,
But strangulation's just the trick
For pesky wives and such—
It's quick and clean and, what's so nice,
It has that personal touch.

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ON OUR COVER

When the Fourth International Congress of Crime Writers convened in New York in May of this year, two of the genre's greatest practitioners took time out to pose for this *EQMM* cover—Julian Symons (left) and Peter Lovesey (right). Before the men had arrived from England, your editor described the agreed-upon scenario to mystery writer George Baxt (who played a murderous monk on the cover of the August 1986 issue). Asked if he could think of a funny headline for the fictitious London newspaper Mr. Symons would be reading, he immediately came up with the only partly visible 10 DOWNING STREET BUGGED—EXTERMINATORS CALLED IN.

MWA Grand Master Julian Symons, whose credits as writer, poet, and critic are too extensive and well celebrated to describe in proper depth here, once summed up his philosophy about crime fiction this way: "I do wish some crime writers would take themselves and their talents à bit more seriously than they do. If you want to be treated seriously as a writer, you've got to put something of yourself, some flavor of personal emotion, into what you write." That he has managed to do this in his own mysteries is verified by George Woodcock in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers*. "In the end," he writes, "it is not for the way he solves the details of crimes that Mr. Symons' novels are interesting, but rather for the way he finds their causes in the minds of men and the shapes of societies."

Winner of both a Silver Dagger and a Gold Dagger from Britain's Crime Writers Association, Peter Lovesey is one of the most popular writers of "historical" detective fiction. (Many devotees of PBS's *Mystery!* got that way because of its early series based on his Sergeant Cribb.) His Gold Dagger Award-winning *The False Inspector Dew* was described by *Publishers Weekly* as "Fun all the way in the best British style."

We thank them both for their generous contributions to *EQMM*.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Squatters are rough these days. Big-time drug dealers back them up, they like having slums for trading in, but the police, when properly approached, take an interest in clearing infested real estate. And there are other ways, too. Hans asked if he could help.

"Even squatters can't get entry, Mr. Thompson," young Frank told him.

"Wild rats? Big bugs?"

Frank belched softly behind a politely raised hand. "A ghost . . ."

FRIENDS

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

We mostly look back when we get old. That's one of those home truths we won't believe in until later, when proof stares us in the face. I don't like looking back—I prefer going ahead, toward ever-receding landscapes—but I don't make the laws of life: another home truth old age offers to displease us.

As there was little more to be done, fate had me surrendered to an existence within repetitive flashbacks, viewed from the terrace glued to my retreat on the Florida Keys. My sole companion was a parrot who didn't like me. He should have liked me in return for liberal daily helpings of Miami-supplied bird deli and overpriced spring water originating hundreds of miles away, but he called me "con man." He pronounced the term delicately, with his head held to the side, whispering, pushing the insult from the tip of his tongue, as if he entrusted me with delicious confidential information. He knew I was a con man because when things got bad, he heard me as I walked into the barren fields stretching toward my cove and shouted, "Hans Thompson, you're a con man!"

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Actually, I'm more than that. I'm also the tormentor of my dear deceased wife, who I humiliated for many long years, never giving in, always interrupting her conversation, always telling her what to do and what not to. I also dodged paying taxes and cared for no one but myself.

A baddie, right?

Sure. However, I do keep trying to provide excuses. It sometimes pays off. I didn't really spoil my wife's life on purpose. She invited trouble, too—the blunt, double-edged knife of daily disharmony was expertly handled by the both of us. Crooking the I.R.S.? Listen, old buddy, you don't really expect me to fund our debt-producing bureaucracy, do you? And if I don't pamper myself, who will? I'm a lonely old geezer, lost, wandering about sadly in my eleven-room "cottage" (that's what we call our dwellings here to impress tourists with our modesty), prey to my own wealth. Who has choices, anyway? Aren't we humans programmed for badness?

I do plead guilty to choosing to be a con man, however. My conscience won't budge there. It's right, I assume guilt.

I used to do real estate in Boston, in partnership with young Frank, who then owned a quarter of our successful enterprise. I was good at what I did and I made our business profitable, but the older I got the less I did. I would mostly disperse approving nods. After a few thousand of those, Frank had done well enough. My patience was rewarded. I wanted out.

"Listen here, Frankie," I said, "either you buy my three quarters or I'll offload my share of the shares to our dishonorable competition." I stared his protests down. "Don't forget," I told him, "with seventy-five percent, I'm king of the castle. I can sell to anyone who offers a reasonable price."

Frankie put on his hangdog mask.

"I don't think," I said, "you'd care to work for the competition, right?"

Frank had to agree. There's no way in the world of real estate that Frankie could work with that bunch of cutthroats.

He didn't mind paying my price if I was willing to finance. I backed off in disgust. "None of that, Frankie. Your senior partner is looking for cash." My figure was steep, for there's such a thing as taking care of the future. Business was booming then, buyers were begging, you couldn't shove pricey property down their throats fast enough, but real estate is a business, and like all business it moves in waves. What soars up crashes down. Fat years turn into lean years. Cap-

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italism roars, capitalism weeps. 'Twas ever thus, and well I knew, having seen prosperity wane into misery and vice versa again and again.

Frank didn't share my foresight. He believed my optimistic sales-talk and was still too inexperienced to see through my self-serving bluffing. He gave me what cash he had and borrowed the balance from the greediest of banks. I grabbed the loot, rushed south, and hardly got myself settled into the luxury of Florida reef life when the market turned and Frank's house of cards began to slide.

A bad business indeed, but good young Frank refused to blame me. He worked even harder and managed to stay more or less upright. He denied himself and his family to keep making payments on his bank loan. I shouldn't have pushed him into that predicament.

Was I punished? Well, yes, I think I was. I'm short of breath these days, my heartbeat sometimes slips into uncontrolled solos, and my stomach tends to cramp. Bad conscience, what else? My wife sighed and left for housewife heaven and the loneliness that replaced her hurt me about as bad as my body. I do the Key things—some fair-weather planing in my 400 HP Suzuki bayboat, a bit of downbeat whoopee that Miami call girls drive down to hand out now and then—I even motor to Key West once a week to share my sunset with the weirdos. But where others see a dapper senior citizen in a Tom Wolfe suit filling in the long vacation, I define myself as an agonized asshole.

Can guilty pains be soothed? My wife's ashes were sprinkled into the cove and I regularly float roses on the spot. It's a bother to get fresh roses sometimes, what with pushy tourist traffic during season and my dimmed eyesight that makes me slow down and infuriates the rig drivers up back. Even so, I keep going. My Jaguar shivers while the hurricane roars up to mile-long bridges, tropical rainstorms flood my windscreen. I make a dramatic effort, not without danger. Once the Jaguar got pushed across two lanes, steel railing sparked, I lost consciousness, and the car got hit by a truck—nearly flipped into the Gulf of Mexico—but I kind of liked that.

What else do I do to reduce the weight of sin? I pay into a fund for the homeless and am easy on others, even when she is a new-to-the-job waitress spilling blood-red chowder over my British striped suit and Thai silk tie. "Never mind, dear." I smile, tip double, call up my probation angel, point out the good deed, and hope the blessed one takes note.

I also think of young Frank. I know exactly how much I took him

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for and would like to pay that back, but I know him too well. He'd tear up the check.

Sometimes things get too much for me in this impossible paradise of clear water and sky, with exotic imported fauna to liven up mangrove jungle and sparse bushes of the native pine, and especially the wondrous, everlasting show provided by abundant and splendid birds: fisheagles nesting on billboards, white herons daintily treading their way through the weeds, pelicans patiently divebombing the cove. Then, overcome, I catch the Boston plane.

Back home, I stay at the best hotel. Whoever cares to notice me (nobody does, but I may fantasize my suppositions) sees me in winter plumage above the burnt-in tan: three-piece tweed, Bogart-style fur-lined raincoat—affluent and empty-handed.

First lunch, traditionally, is with young Frank, who politely wants to know how things are.

"Good," I assure him. "Everything is smooching along as planned. How about you, meboy?"

Frank doesn't want to load me down with his worries. Isn't he keeping up the firm's good name? He wants me to believe things couldn't be better. Most of our staff is gone, the old half-page advertising splendor is reduced to a square inch in a cheap place, and the Beacon Hill office is moved to a Cambridge alley, but we won't mention any of these trifles.

Frank holds onto a big smile.

"Anything wrong, meboy?"

So Frankie tells me, after all—in bits and pieces connected by the slight stutter that's part of his tarnished image these days. The Dutch dark beer I like to lunch on and which I urge on submissive Frank helps to open him up. Business is disastrous, but (his smile recalls days long past) there's still one good chance to get back, contained within a four-story waterfront warehouse near Fosters Wharf that he bought outright at an auction, cheap.

"Big building, meboy? Refurbishable? Future lofts for the wealthy artistic?"

"Yessir. Badly abused, of course, but the possibilities are in place." Frank warms up. "Splendid location—adjacent properties have been remodeled as elegant condominiums. It's a solid project that can easily house five huge apartments. The view reaches all the way across the harbor. There shouldn't be a finance problem, either. The bank had a look and the loan officer loves the project."

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Great. Just what young Frank needed. So why didn't his smile hold?

"I can't get into the building," Frank said.

Squatters? Squatters are rough these days. Big-time drug-dealers back them up, they like having slums for trading in, but the police, when properly approached, take an interest in clearing infested real estate. And there are other ways, too. Could I help?

"Even squatters can't get entry, Mr. Thompson."

"Wild rats? Big bugs?"

Frank belched softly behind a politely raised hand. "A ghost."

I didn't laugh that one off. I have some experience with ghosts. I won't admit to the gift in public, but I'm a bit of a medium myself—a "channeler," as they call it these days. I meet with dead people at times. They don't bother, always step aside nicely.

First one was Uncle Jerry, most unexpectedly met with in the upstairs corridor of our old house in Charles Street. I must have been five years old when the incident occurred, and urgently motivated by a pressing piddle. There Uncle strutted along, under his wide-rimmed felt hat, behind his silvertopped cane. Uncle always behaved like a good guy, so I wasn't supposed to be frightened —although I had no idea what he could be doing in our corridor in the early hours, and how come I could suddenly look through his neat old shape? It was the night Uncle died. He was known for his politeness and I think now he wanted to say goodbye.

Later on I saw other ghosts. A gentleman who had been run over by a truck and walked calmly, and in good order, toward the sky, leaving his mashed body on the tarmac. Then—a more recent experience—there was Sam, our cat, being ripped apart by the ferócious Doberman from up the road and simultaneously wafting away through the abundant foliage of our poinciana tree.

Much farther down the Florida Keys, close to the mainland, next to an extensive cemetery, I ran out of gas once and had to listen to the residents' thin crying while observing their vague movements.

"A ghost holds up your money project?" I asked Frank.

Frank nodded. "I didn't want to believe it, either, Mr. Thompson, but I did try to spend a night in the building's loft. The last inhabitant left some furniture and I relaxed on his couch for a minute, must have dozed off." Frank dabbed at sweat drops on his forehead. "I had a bad time, Mr. Thompson. I couldn't stand it—rushed out

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after a while, fell down, hurt my ankle. Cut my shin, too. I haven't dared to go back."

Businessmen try to be pragmatic. Frank is a good Catholic.

"Get a priest," I said. "Your religion accepts ghosts. The priest shows up with his incense burner and all spooky spoilsports take themselves somewhere else."

Frank smiled shakily. "Yes, Mr. Thompson. I did get an exorcist, but it didn't work at all. The priest is seeing a therapist now—a Zen Trappist monk." He tried to laugh cynically.

I might have entered into a discussion, but I suddenly saw what I was about to do. I presented my suggestion.

"You?" Frank asked. "But, sir, you've got heart trouble—you should take things easy."

"I'd like to see the project, Frank," I said.

We made an appointment and met that evening in front of Frank's building. I couldn't help rubbing my hands gleefully when I saw the property's strong lines, solid foundation, and framing. If Frank could get this project to move, he'd make up his losses and have plenty to spare. I could see it all: gut the inside, construct plastered and whitewashed interior walls, put up mahogany wainscoting in the living rooms and studies, use marble floors for the halls, install huge picture windows to maximize on the waterfront views, throw in jacuzzis, go all out on the industrial-sized elevator (I envisioned a little Victorian anteroom, complete with Empire easy chairs on a Persian rug), rig laundry chutes to the basement, and a centralized vacuum cleaner with outlets everywhere. Oh dear-dear-dear, prices could be jacked skyhigh and an easy half million made forthwith.

I congratulated Frank on his lucky find.

"Thank you," Frank said. "But what good is it if nobody can spend any time in the building? I won't allow you to go in, either, sir. I plan to auction the property, and hopefully I'll get my investment back."

To improve Frank's mood, I took him to one of the cozy new eating places near Battery Street and loosened his resistance with whiskey up front and cognac for dessert. During the evening he gave me the building's key.

Guilt causes courage, but not enough in my case. I was sorry before I closed the door behind me. The light switch didn't function. The flashlight Frank had given me illuminated a dust cloud that pre-

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ceded me into the creaky elevator. A momentarily visible rat and his rustling companions made me groan with fear and I dropped the flashlight and broke it.

The elevator's cast-iron harmonica door squeaked sarcastically when I reached the top floor. I groped about shakily, managed to find the loft's entry, and more rusty hinges complained as I pushed open a door and contemplated the huge hole behind it. Finally mustering enough courage to enter, I was caught by a curtain that wrapped itself around my neck. I tore free and the curtain retreated to a window, sucked back by a draft.

Streetlights helped me see the curtain's folded face, and I heard its voice, built up out of the hinges' creaking, a car that snarled by on the quay, the ploppering of a helicopter high above the harbor.

"Heeheehee," an old man laughed. "Coming to vihihisit?"

I could hear my heart's rattle bouncing off my ribs.

The curtain embraced me again and I struggled with it weakly. The little light that sneaked in from the street seemed cold and uncaring. I sat on the windowsill. The old man had somehow managed to grow a shape that could float free—I saw him as a wasted derelict, a streetperson strayed indoors. Hollow sounds ejected from between his bony jaws, scarcely covered by dried-out skin. I noticed his long and slender canines, green-edged with age, but still strong and sharp. There was a sparkle of deeply socketed eyes under brows that looked bent from rusty wire.

So Frank's apparition did exist: a sketchy but fearsome reflection of a past human form. The ghost dressed himself in paint-splashed pants dangling from frayed pink suspenders. He came closer again, clawing his long bone-fingers, stabbing with blackened doglike nails, then backed off and searched in the rear of the vast room, rummaged in a cupboard where glasses tinkled. Then, evidently not finding what he was looking for, he moved away, shuffling on old-fashioned checkered slippers.

Okay, so this demon stood between Frank's and my financial recovery. What could he do to me? I tried to remember good old Uncle Jerry—*he* didn't harm me, and neither did the spooks partying above the cemetery near Miami. I managed to still my shaky nerves and moved away from the windowsill, aiming for a filthy couch. I found an empty wine bottle on the way and picked it up, considering it to be somewhat of a weapon.

The loft smelled of mold. Something moved from a large crack in the wall facing me and became an oversized moth, shaking itself

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free of crumbly cement. It flapped close and I swung the bottle, missing the foe but managing to knock off my glasses with my other hand. I was on the floor groping for them, finally locating them and putting them on again, when I saw a rat's beady eyes looking at me. The foot-sized beast stepped briskly forward, ears pointed, bare tail curled up. The moth's wings touched my neck. The ghost shuffled by, stopped, turned toward me, and scratched its thin nose as if suddenly surprised.

"Hey."

I cleared my throat. "Sir?"

"You're not to use that couch," he shrieked. "Ef off. *I* sleep there."

"You're dead, Mr. Ghost," I said—slowly, as if peeling the words off my tongue.

"What if I am?" he asked. "You're still on my couch." I noticed that some of his words got away from him and trilled along as if blown out of a pathetic pennywhistle.

Rat and moth rushed and flew about, straight through my ghostly host—the rat traversed his skinny ankles, the moth pierced his head.

He pointed at me. "A drop?"

"What was that?" I asked.

"A drop. Gimme that bottle."

I made my reluctant body get up from the couch. Maybe the ghost would respond to a bit of good manners. I bowed, said my name.

His claw rushed at me, grabbed the bottle, slapped its bottom, approached the neck with his beaklike nose, and inhaled noisily.

I asked what his name was.

He put the bottle on the floor—carefully, as if he was saving its precious contents. "Nothing to do with you, effah," he croaked. "Here, here, you eff off, right? Or—" He pranced closer, clapping his hands.

"I can't leave," I said.

His hands dropped. "Why not?"

"Because of my former partner," I said. "The man you chased away. He paid good money for this building and now you won't let anyone near the place. I'm here to make you see it's *you* who has to leave."

The rusty eyebrows moved up. "Your man bought my building? So where's the cash?"

"You're dead, sir," I said. "Money is no good to you."

His claws closed slowly around the frayed pink suspenders. "Cash buys booze. *Give,* you effah." The recessed eyes twinkled. He evidently liked the expression. He said it again. "Effah!" He laughed.

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"Maybe the cash passed to your heirs," I said.

The suddenly released suspenders hit his ribcase. "Don't have none."

"So what's left for you here?" I asked. "Why don't you go to heaven where you're awaited? Heaven is supposed to be quite a pleasant place."

"Listen," he squeaked, "maybe I can't call the cops any more but there's lots of devils here. You want me to set a few on you?" He looked over his shoulder. "The man here wants your home. Come on, boys, get him." His transparent finger poked through my chest.

The rat showed up and sat half within the old man's feet, the animal's face more clearly drawn than the ghost's outline. The rat was real.

"And so am I real," the ghost said. "More so even."

Telepathy. Why not? Released from the body, ghosts should be better equipped with subtle senses than us.

The spook's finger wobbled. "You've no idea what we can be up to here."

"You're unsubstantial," I said. "You can't hurt me."

"You're an effah. As soon as you're asleep, your mind is mine and once I chew it a bit it should have trouble getting back." He giggled. "How's that for substance? Remember how your friend gave in? So, are you leaving now maybe? Or do you want me to tear at your substantial soul while Ratty here nibbles on your toes? Pain is pain and you're about to feel it." He waved both arms. "Here's your last chance. We get you at the count of three. Uh-one, uh-two—"

The moth frightened me more than the ghost or the rat. The huge insect came fluttering toward me from the old man's navel. I tried to catch the wicked insect, but it evaded me smartly. The old man laughed at my hectic dance of fear.

I was getting tired, but there was no way I could allow myself to nod off. Unfortunately, I do tend to fall asleep suddenly of late and I can't do without naps. I sleep helplessly in cabs, planes, waiting rooms.

The ghost read my mind and sneered. He pointed at the couch. "Go *ahead,* lie down, relax—heh heh."

I did have to lie down. He tiptoed around the couch—I could hear the joint in his foot bones crackle. I tried to sit up so I could ward off his blows, but I felt too weak. The alcoholic dinner was a bad mistake. Sleepy, drunk, and fighting a demon—all this would hardly

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improve my fate. The old man soon had his fangs in my throat. "Nice booze," he murmured.

"Vampire," I groaned.

"Nah." He withdrew and briefly touched his mouth with the back of his hand. "I only need the vapors. Real blood would be gross." He gestured toward the door. "Okay, I'll let you go." His eyes glinted briefly. "Get lost."

I staggered to the door. Frank would just have to excuse me—each man has his limit. I'd come dangerously close to mine.

A cruising cab stopped and took me to the hotel. The phone in my room was ringing. "Thank heaven," Frank said. "How did it go?"

"Yes, yes," I said vaguely. "Frank—what's the old geezer called?"

"Max Polski."

"What else do you know?"

"He was an eccentric miser," Frank said. "He used to let the building out to sweatshops, but he kept raising the rent and finally everybody left. Then he moved in himself and spent most of his time drinking. Didn't pick up his mail one week, and when the postman got the police to break down the door old Max had been dead on his couch for quite a while. The city auctioned the place to collect unpaid taxes. —We're up against the devil here, sir."

"Frank," I said, "unfortunately, I'm not a quitter. Phone some cleaning outfit as soon as you hit your office. I want them to go there right away with a sizable crew—safety in numbers—and scrub out that place good. All the furniture and curtains—whatever clutters the place up gets into a dumpster and away. Have them clean out cobwebs, soak the floors with whatever dissolves vermin, sprinkle rat poison around, blow killing gas into the cracks."

"Any idea of the cost, sir?" Frank asked sadly.

"No problem—I pay," I said brightly.

Frank stood his ground. "Please, Mr. Thompson, you're wasting your money. Nothing works against that kind of evil. Even the priest—"

"The priest prepared our way," I said. "Max must be weaker since the good man whacked him with incantations and incense. I probably got through to him a little, too. His morale should be low now. Get that cleaning crew, Frank. Today. On the double."

I felt Frank weakening. The building mattered to him as much as it did to me. He must have understood by then that I wanted to even things out with him. My brain may be obsolete but I can still

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do simple sums. The profit Frank could make on Polski's place would equal what I suckered him for on that goodbye deal I set up for him when we split. If I could get Max out, it should lessen my load of guilt.

The next night I showed up at the building again. The smell of cleaning products nearly knocked me over. Polski's wafty appearance waited for me on the top floor. His ratty friend was around but seemed rather listless and the moth was nursing a torn-up wing.

"You did all this to me?" Polski asked softly.

"Max," I said, "do me a favor and think of others for a change. You're dead. Go where the dead have a good time and leave the living so that we can get some peace down here."

Polski hooked his thin arms and dropped his chin. "Nobody pushes me into hell, mister. I'm okay right here, this is my turf."

I sighed. "Okay. What do we do—have another fight? You're very welcome, Max." I showed him a trembling fist. "Here we go again."

There he came, behind his bony sharp fists, but all his uppercuts passed right through me. "You wait!" he screamed. "You'll be asleep in a minute and I'll tear you up properly again. My mind against yours. You got heart trouble, right? Won't have it in the morning, you effah! Know why?" He laughed thinly. "Because your heart will have stopped."

I grinned as I walked through him, but I knew he wasn't bragging. I had to lie down sometime soon, allowing Max free play.

This time he treated me with visions. Dissolving corpses dripped from the ceiling and walls, the floor rotted away, and I fell into moving caverns where I nearly suffocated in my own filth. All my past mistakes were acted out on stages cut out into the living rock, with superb actors in correct settings, showing me the sordid pettiness of my miserable existence. Unable to tear myself away, I also watched what my foul behavior was doing to other people's lives. It seemed as if nothing I ever did had produced anything but trouble.

Fortunately, I did manage to wake up every now and then so that I could recuperate somewhat, wandering about in the thoroughly scrubbed building, but then I'd nod off again and slide into where Polski was waiting, aiming his lobster-sized moth at me.

"Please," I said, groveling at his feet, "give in, Max. You can't win. I'll get through this night and I'll still be around in the morning. I'll bulldoze the building—you'll have nowhere to stay."

He called me lyrical but foul names.

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"Yell away," I said. "Waste your time and effort—once you're done you'll go where you belong."

"Never." His voice wavered even higher.

The sun finally floated subtly designed abstract art on the loft's back wall. Polski faded and I went back to the hotel. I had Frank send some men down with sledgehammers and a pneumatic drill, under orders to make a racket but do little real damage. No business like show business to impress the foolish.

That night Max agreed to talk.

"No deals," I kept assuring him. "You just have to leave."

"Where to?"

"To the destiny that your activity here created for you." (Dear me, hear me—Mum was right, I could have been a preacher.)

Polski had little faith in rewards in the hereafter. He described his earthly activities for me. I had to agree that they added up to a wasted life, with a bad start and a bad end, and much misery in between.

"Alone, always alone," squeaked Max. "Never a friend."

I sighed. "Same here."

"And I won't go." Polski's canines ground horribly. "Go ahead, work on the building, remodel—the minute you put the apartments on the market you'll find me back again."

I was nodding off and could see him clearly: a human scarecrow, lost between heaven and earth. I left but he stayed within my thoughts.

He gave in the following night. We sat next to each other on the floor. Max socialized a bit, wanted to know where I lived, what I did, whether I had a good time with it. I politely answered all his queries: "On a lesser known bridge-connected mangrove and coral-based island off the Florida coast." "I'm retired, just tootle around. Sure, I drink—every night under the banyan tree when it isn't too hot and the mosquitos lighten up." "Yes, Max, it's very nice down there."

"That's in the tropics?"

"Absolutely," I said.

Max huddled up, arms wound tightly around his knees, and shivered. Then he smiled. "Thompson, sir?"

"Mr. Polski?"

He shrugged. "Okay. You win. Tell young Frank the building is his, I'm moving out." There were tears in his eyes, no doubt caused

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by the vapors of the cleaning products. Or maybe they were tears of rage due to the loss of his spacious living quarters and tastefully arranged furniture. Perhaps the gassed roaches that crunched under my feet infuriated him. Or might we suppose that some heavenly light had finally penetrated his shadows, that Max suddenly realized that others have needs, too?

"You're serious, Max?"

"I am," Polski said quietly.

We left the place together, waved goodbye by the coughing rat and the wounded moth. Polski's shape was erased by glaring headlights as a car passed us as we stepped into the street. I waited around for a few minutes for him to reappear but he didn't show up.

Until the next evening, when the lights in the Miami-bound airplane flicked out for a moment and there he sat next to me, his raggedy appearance penetrated by soft moonlight, on the seat where I was storing my new hat. I whipped it through his ghostly appearance. He grinned and faded, but returned again in my car on the highway connecting the Keys, attentively studying the Gulf of Mexico on one side, the Atlantic Ocean on the other.

Azure versus cobalt waters, we don't lack for striking colors here.

"This isn't heaven, Max," I said.

His canines showed in the widest of smiles. "Good enough for me, Mr. Thompson."

"Please get lost," I pleaded.

Max shook his grisly head. "If I do, I'll head back for the Boston building."

Impossible. I had promised young Frank that I'd done away with all obstructions. I drove on in glum silence. Max admired a group of turkey vultures circling some carrion on an islet that seemed to have floated out of the mangrove tangle on our right. The birds were landing, one by one, dark wings extended, claws and beaks ready to bite and tear. Max sighed happily. "I wouldn't mind a drop of something or other. Happen to have anything on board?"

I found a miniature bourbon bottle, souvenir from the plane, sipped its contents, then let him sniff. "Aaaah," he said.

Once home, I rigged up a hotpoint on the terrace, where I steamed up more whiskey in a small kettle. Bourbon vapor turns out to be Max's favorite ticket to Higher Insight. Every night I see him kneel-

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ing on the terrace, inhaling deeply. After that, he sometimes engages in dance and song or recites poetry with an Irish accent.

He isn't as much bother as I feared. When bored, he occasionally wanders about my quarters, but he usually manages to stay fairly busy and out of my way.

Some squatters drowned when they wrecked their boat on the coral across our cove last year and Max likes to invite their ghostly remains to share his vapors. When the moon is full, he flaps rhythmically around the banana trees and I can vaguely hear the eerie beat of voodoo drums, maybe associated with memories of runaway Haitian slaves, shipwrecked here a century ago. As time goes on, he avoids me more and more, except when I'm late heating his whiskey, then he thickens his shape and hangs about, whispering exotic curses he's picked up from his contacts.

The parrot has stopped insulting me, for he's a channeler/visionary, too, and very likely aware of recent changes. He also can perceive our new non-paying tenant, and shakes his wings and screeches enthusiastically whenever Max's semi-transparent form glides past his cage.

Frank phoned the other day to inform me of recent progress. The condo is by no means completed, but he sold one of the five apartments, collecting a down payment that even at this early stage does away with all his financial worries.

While I type these notes, an oversized night moth tries to break down my screen door, a rat rustles along a wall in a nearby room, and my live-in spook floats above the terrace, humming a Seminole Indian hunting hymn. The parrot screeches sleepily. It's late. Soon I'll get up from the desk, straighten my aching back, yawn luxuriously, and wish all my friends a most sincere goodnight.

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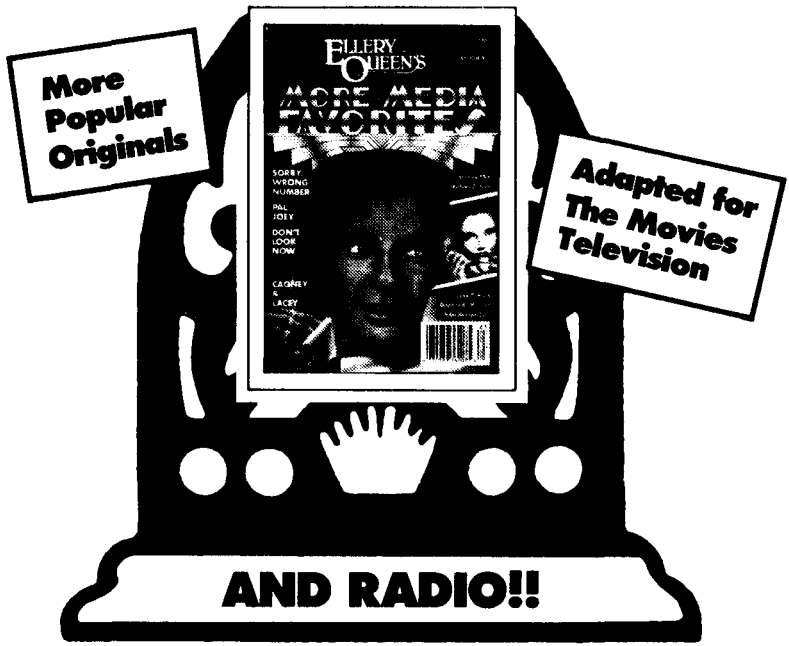

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

The movie was romantic. Then it became a tragedy. Montgomery Clift was a boy without money. His girl friend was Shelley Winters. He met Elizabeth Taylor, who was beautiful and rich. And she loved him. But he couldn't marry her because Winters was pregnant. So he took Winters out in a rowboat and let her drown. At the end, they charged him with murder and he was convicted.

When it was over, Mary was badly shaken. Red said, "Any man who works at a job he hates has to sympathize with that poor bastard . . ."

COMING CLEAN

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"You'd run a mile," Mary Pinner said, "if you ever found out what I've done."

"Try me," Mason said. He signaled the waiter. They were in a dark little bar on Mansfield, behind the hotel. He thought she lit up the place with those green eyes shining out of the broad, solemn face. Listening to her peppy conversation was delightful.

Mary couldn't tell him the really bad one, about Elvira. She would probably never tell him that. So why not make up something? It might be interesting to invent wicked behavior and observe his reaction.

"I used to shoplift," she said. "Silly things like a package of pantyhose." She enlarged on the story, imagining herself in a variety store. "We were never poor," she concluded, "so I have no excuse. There were always lots of toys and presents when I was a kid. Anyway, it's why I had to leave Baytown."

Red Mason smiled. He had this noble face—to the manor born was

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how Mary thought of him. At one time, his hair must have been red. Now it was silver and not much of it. He looked too old for her, but he was the first appealing man she had encountered during three years in Montreal. He said, "It's no big deal. Are you still doing it?"

"Not since I came here."

"Now I know your ugly secret."

"You could tie me to this chair, I'll never tell you my ugly secret."

She would have enjoyed staying with him and having a meal, but Red had places to go. Mary left him outside the bar, walked to Peel Station, and rode the Metro home. In the apartment-building lobby, she found a letter in her mailbox. It was from her mother. She read it at the kitchen table, fighting her way through the paragraphs of self-pity. Picking up the telephone, she dialed the Baytown number.

"Hi, it's me."

"Did you get my letter?"

"Why else would I be calling, a heartless daughter like me? Did you get the money?"

"A check in the mail is not the answer. There's plenty of room in the house. If you lived here, neither of us would have a money problem."

"But I don't live there. I live in Montreal." Not much longer, however, if things kept going right.

"You don't know what it's like to be alone. With your father gone—"

"You aren't the easiest person to live with."

"If only Elvira was alive."

"Thanks, Mother," Mary said. "I needed that."

Two days later, Mary was at her desk. It was after four o'clock, so she was doing Credit Union work. Several of the hotel's hourly employees, mostly kitchen staff, had come around to put cash in their share-accounts. Now here was Red Mason in his anonymous blue suit, looking almost like a hotel guest.

"How are things in Personnel?" he asked.

"Okay. How are things in Security?"

Looking as if he meant it, Mason said, "It's a lousy job, but some weeks you come out a few bucks ahead."

He gave her thirty dollars and she wrote up his passbook. The transaction complete, he began shooting the breeze. He told her about nabbing a dishwasher heading out the employee's exit with a side of bacon under his coat.

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Mary felt her face turn hot. "What's going to happen to him?"

"I don't believe he'll be prosecuted. He's lost his job, of course."

"Of course."

"I can see it bothers you." He tapped the back of her hand with a finger. "You're a sympathetic girl, Mary. It does you credit."

"It's not my business, but I don't understand how you can come down on those poor people. They make peanuts. Some of them are desperate."

He said, "Most of us are. Does that mean we can take what we want?"

"Mr. Rocheleau, my boss, has a thoroughbred racehorse. He runs it at Blue Bonnets, as well as at tracks in the States. Know what I heard? He and a couple of other owners were caught fixing a race." Mary recalled the morning the news hit the papers. There had been nothing contrite about Rocheleau. He was smug, as if he was enjoying the notoriety. "The penalty was a few thousand dollars' fine, which to Rocheleau is like a slap on the wrist. He's still racing."

"Nobody ever said life is fair."

"Yes they did." Mary tucked ledgers in a drawer and slammed it shut. "Every Sunday they used to tell me."

He took her to dinner and they danced afterward, up top at the Chateau Champlain—patronizing the competition as Mary put it. Her mind was on Elvira. It was their Sunday School teacher who had told them about honesty being not the best but the only policy. So when Mary took packages of gum from the corner store, Elvira refused to accept any of it. After that, Mary would toss the stolen items into tall grass and pretend to find them.

"Look, I see something!" She could remember the foil package gleaming in the sunlight.

Elvira was running after her across the lawn. "How can you see so good?"

"Because I'm not always wandering in a dream."

"I'm not wandering."

"Keep your hands away." Mary slapped her tiny fingers. "If you want some, you have to ask."

"Please, may I have some?"

"If there's any left."

Slow dancing, Red Mason said, "What are you thinking about?"

She took her face back from his, letting her weight rest against the strong arm holding her. "My little sister," she said.

"What about her?"

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If she told him the bad one, he would despise her. She would lose this intriguing man. So she gave him something else to think about, twisting the truth. "It was the morning after the twenty-fourth of May, Firecracker Day. Elvira and I went around the lawns gathering up used volcanos and roman candles and sky rockets. The casings smelled of gunpowder. We took them to our back yard and made a bonfire of them behind the shed. My mother saw the smoke and came running. She was mad as hell, we could have burned down the building." Mary closed her eyes, lowering her head to his shoulder. "Elvira took the blame and I let her. She got spanked. I only got told off."

Mason was taking this seriously. "Where is Elvira?"

"She died young."

He drew her closer and the music soared, almost as if they were people in a movie. Beyond a row of dark windows, Mary saw a million lights splashed around Mount Royal with the illuminated Cross suspended in the black night. "Well," he said, "I'm sure she forgives you now."

A couple of casual dates later, Mary was becoming impatient to move the relationship forward. She appreciated the way he hadn't come on to her in the beginning. Now she began to wonder if he didn't like girls. It was possible. Or maybe it was something about her. In high school, there had been a boy. He never noticed her. Mary invited him to the Sadie Hawkins dance and he said yes. He was attentive and courteous all evening and they danced almost every dance, but she knew he couldn't wait to take her home. And there was no kiss at the door.

Now she asked Mason back to her place for a bite to eat. Sensing he'd expect a tidy house, she had spent hours making the place clean and neat. He looked just right in her living room, settling into the big chair by the window. Mary felt self-conscious with him watching as she put things on the table. But they never had any trouble talking, and soon they were eating. She was glad she had bought a second bottle of wine.

When he helped her carry things into the kitchen, she said, "You're housebroken."

"I've lived alone."

Actually, not always. As a cop with the Centralia Police Department, Mason had shared a flat for three years with his partner, Tiny Clark. They were a good team. On patrol, they covered each other

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in more than one dicey confrontation. At home, Tiny did the cooking and Mason looked after the washing up. Arguments would end with Tiny screaming something like, "You want a divorce?"

"No way I'll ever pay you alimony!" Mason would yell as doors slammed and one or the other took a hike.

Then the bad times arrived. Cops were on the take. Tiny was one of them. They wanted to put Mason on the list, but he would have none of it. Internal Affairs began an investigation, asking Mason to testify. He couldn't refuse. "You're stealing," he told his flat-mate. "I hate it, and I'm going to talk about it."

Nobody got fired. There were transfers and one of them was Mason. The new precinct saw him coming. They ostracized him, so he resigned. Now no police force would touch him, so he had ended up in hotels.

In her kitchen, Mary was giving him glances.

"You might not like me."

"Let me be the judge of that," she said, giving him their best kiss so far.

On the sofa, they did not go quite all the way. But he demonstrated enough interest to dispel any fears about his masculinity. It was nice, like dating a boy in high school. Mary was sure they would make love soon, and once this happened he would be hers forever. Mason was that sort of man.

When she came back from the bathroom, he had the television on and was switching channels with the remote control. Pausing at a black-and-white closeup of two familiar faces, he said, "Hey, this is a great movie. *A Place in the Sun.*"

"I don't think I saw it." There were always films showing that Mary wanted to see, but she felt shy attending the cinema by herself. "Isn't that Elizabeth Taylor?"

"And Montgomery Clift. Do you mind watching?"

"I'd love it." She snuggled close.

The story was romantic. Then it became a tragedy. Clift was a boy without money. His girl friend was Shelley Winters. He met Taylor, who was beautiful and rich. And she loved him. But he couldn't marry her because Winters was pregnant. So he took Winters out in a rowboat and let her drown. At the end, they charged him with murder and he was convicted.

When it was over, Mary was badly shaken. Red said, "Any man who works at a job he hates has to sympathize with that poor bastard."

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"Is it that way with you?"

"I only do it for the money, kid," he said.

"The movie is so similar to my—" Mary made a decision. "I've been holding back about something I did a long time ago. But now I think you should know."

"Tell me."

The recollection, once it started, flowed as easily as the drama on screen. She described the situation years ago between herself and her sister. "I'd been the only child for six years. Then Elvira came along. All right, I was spoiled. But she was a lot prettier, and they gave her everything she wanted. I had to babysit. Sometimes I took it out on her."

"You hit her?"

"I smacked her, yes."

Mary remembered playing checkers with Elvira. She was not concentrating because she could hear her parents arguing downstairs. Daddy had banged the door when he came home late. That meant he was drunk.

"There and there and there—" Elvira was slapping the board with her checker as she made a multiple jump.

"You cheated!"

"I didn't! I won!"

Mary grabbed the edge of the blanket, flipping the board and checkers into her sister's face. Elvira screamed and began flailing with both fists. Mary was protecting herself when the door burst open. Their father came into the room, wild-eyed. "Can't you leave your sister alone?"

"She started it!"

"You're the oldest." His hand whacked her bare shoulder.

It was an episode Mary preferred not to describe, so all she said to Mason was, "She'd tell on me and I'd get grounded."

"A lot of siblings don't like each other."

"Not this bad." Mary skipped to the ending. "One summer when I was fifteen and she was nine, we were staying at The Cedars. It's a lake north of Baytown, with cabins. You can rent boats. There weren't a lot of people on the water. We were the only boat out near the middle of the lake. I had the oars and Elvira wanted to row. She got up and tried to change places. There was struggling and the boat went over. I'm not sure I should tell you this."

"You have to."

"I'm a strong swimmer. Elvira had barely learned. She was flailing

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around a few yards from me. I could have grabbed her. But I just headed for shore."

"You were panicked. It's natural to want to survive."

"No. I was calm. It was like in the movie. I realized if I did nothing, she'd drown. And that was what I wanted."

Mason drew her close. "You've got a king-size guilty conscience," he said gently. But he did not kiss her.

"You know the worst about me now," she said. "And you won't love me any more." As if he had said he did.

"Someday you'll discover my secret," he said. "Then we'll see who cares about who."

Contrary to her fear, he didn't shun her. One evening after work, he said, "Cops are people-watchers. Are you?" They rode the Metro under the river to La Ronde, where they sat on a bench within sight of the carnival rides, eating caramel corn and observing the passing parade.

"Were you ever married, Red?" She held her breath because the question was important.

"Never. It always seemed like too much trouble."

"A couple can help each other."

"So if you need help, get married."

"You sound rough. I don't think you're that rough."

Mason took a few quiet breaths to compose himself. He didn't want to lose her, having got this far. Then he said calmly, "Look at all the divorces. Those are people who got married and found out it was too much trouble."

A few nights later, he invited her to his place for a meal and they made love. She stayed over, fixing breakfast at dawn in his kitchenette.

Over coffee, she said, "I like us."

He said, "We need a lot more money than I've got, kiddo."

That sounded like progress. "Two can live as cheaply as one."

"Don't you believe it. We're not going to live in this ugly place. Forgive me—not in yours, either. Have you checked the rent on proper apartments?"

It seemed crazy now not to mention the money. So she did, without revealing how she had managed to accumulate this much. "I have something put away. It could be enough for a downpayment on a house. It's foolish to rent if you don't have to."

"How much have you got?"

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"Almost forty thousand."

He looked impressed. "Who died? Your rich uncle?"

They began talking about houses. Mary knew where she would have liked to live. Many times she had taken a bus through Notre Dame de Grace, noticing For Sale signs, realizing she could never settle in Montreal. Mason agreed that paying rent made no sense if you could afford to buy. He did some figuring on the back of an envelope, adding their monthly salaries together, estimating expenses. He ended up with a tentative smile on his face. "We could just about make it," he concluded.

There was one more thing she had to tell him. Since it would be impossible for them to stay in this city, he had to be told. "The money is in the bank under another name," she said.

"Why another name?"

She took a passbook from her purse and showed him the name on it. Mildred Perry. And she experienced a feeling that was both frightening and reassuring—she wanted Red to know it all. "I've been taking money from the Credit Union. The auditor only shows up once a year. A lot of cash comes in and I've been putting some of it here."

"You've got guts, Mary. Telling a security man."

"We love each other."

"How did you expect to be able to spend it?"

"As soon as it reached fifty thousand, I was going to take off for a warm climate. But your arrival has muddied my thinking."

He got up and came around the table, raising her from her seat, sitting there himself, then drawing her down onto his lap. He held her like a child. "When you level, you really level. Now hear this."

She listened, having trouble believing what she was being told, yet knowing it was the truth. His main assignment as a house detective was not catching the petty pilferers on staff. Mary Pinner was his case. Management had suspected for some time that she was taking Credit Union money. Rather than confront her and perhaps have her take off, they instructed Mason to get close to her. He was to verify the situation and discover where the cash was going.

"Now," he said, "we know all about each other."

"You were setting me up."

"I never expected to feel this way about you."

"So out come the handcuffs?"

"That's Management's decision . . ."

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Mary headed home and went to bed. She slept into the middle of the day. When she woke up, she was anything but depressed. In fact, she felt joyful because she knew what she had to do. She took a taxi to the hotel and went directly to her boss's office.

"Sorry I didn't call in," she said. "I wasn't well."

It was as if Rocheleau had been looking forward to the encounter. "Are you all right now?"

"Yes, I am."

"Sit down. You don't look all right."

The leather chair chilled her bare arms, she must have been burning up. "You were right to suspect me. I *have* been taking money. It was wrong and I can never justify it. But every penny is in the bank, plus interest. I'm writing a check this afternoon and depositing it in the Credit Union account. If the hotel wants to go ahead and prosecute me—"

"No need to prosecute. Not if the money's restored."

Mary realized he was showing her increased respect. "Anyway, you'll want me out of here."

"Not necessarily. You've been the best secretary I've ever had. Now that you've come clean about this business, you could be even better."

"It's up to you," she said.

"We want you to stay."

"Then I'm staying."

Mary returned to her desk, where she made out a personal check for all the money in her secret account, then filled in a Credit Union deposit slip. She would go to the bank in a few minutes, but first, not allowing herself to think about it, she dialed Security. "Red Mason, please," she said.

"He's not here. Is that Mary?"

"Yes. Could you have him call me?"

"He's gone. Didn't you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"We're not even sure his name is Mason." The girl in Security sounded excited. "He was brought in to check out somebody on staff—nobody knows who. He did the job and now he's moved on."

It was necessary to say something. "I wonder what I should do with his share account in the Credit Union."

"Is it a lot?"

"Fifty dollars."

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"Probably it was hotel money to begin with. If it was me, I'd keep it."

Mary put the telephone down and waited for the agony to start. But she still felt pretty good. Red Mason was apparently gone forever—he seemed to have taken some of her guilt away with him.

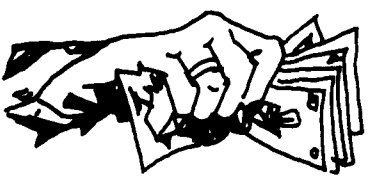
After work, Mary did something new for her. She went to a movie alone and afterward she had dinner and two glasses of wine. Then she traveled home not by Metro but by taxi. She was rewarding herself for good behavior, celebrating the clean slate.

More than one option was open. She could return to Baytown to live with her mother in the house that would one day be hers. That was the worst scenario. She could change jobs. Rocheleau no longer appealed to her now that there were no secrets between them. But would he try to kill her chances by refusing a letter of recommendation? If he did, she would be forced to emigrate. And that might open some interesting doors.

There was a message on her telephone-answering machine.

"Mary, it's me." Red Mason had obviously been drinking. "Can we talk? I've had second thoughts about what's going on. Especially what I'm doing for a living. We're a good couple. Let's take your money and get on that plane. Wherever we go will be better than this. You won't regret it, girl. Give me a call when you get in." He ended by reciting his number.

Mary kept rewinding the tape and playing it while she got ready for bed. The last thing she did was put the machine on Erase. Then she listened one final time to be sure it was wiped clean.



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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"I've already called the state police to set up roadblocks," Sheriff Lens told them.

"The driver could have been a woman," Dr. Sam said. "I saw a flash of long blond hair."

"I saw it, too," Mary Best confirmed. "But I didn't see any of their faces. They went by too fast."

"You should wait outside, Miss," the sheriff suggested, trying to block her view of the body as it was placed on the stretcher.

"It's all right," she said. "I'm a nurse."

"You are?" *Dr. Sam's face registered his surprise. "I've been advertising for a nurse to work in my office."*

She gave him a smile. "I already have a job waiting for me in Springfield . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE BLACK ROADSTER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"No, bank robberies aren't what they used to be," old Dr. Sam Hawthorne was saying over his brandy. "Today someone walks up to the teller with a note and she hands him a packet of money set aside for just that purpose. He strolls out while the automatic cameras snap his picture, and that night it's on the local news. In most cases, nobody even sees a gun. In the old days, when I was a country doctor practicing in Northmont, things were different. This was the Depression, the days of John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, and Baby Face Nelson, to say nothing of Bonnie and Clyde.

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Those people didn't bother with notes. They had shotguns and tommyguns to deliver their message."

This was in the spring of 1935 (Dr. Sam continued), a few weeks before Easter, which wasn't until April twenty-first that year. I was still without an assistant since my nurse April left to marry a resort owner up in Maine. On this particular Monday I'd phoned long distance to tell her of the peculiar events leading to the sudden departure of her replacement. Perhaps I secretly hoped she'd come back for a week or two, but I should have known better. She was being married in less than three weeks, on the Saturday after Easter.

"I'm sorry about your troubles, Sam," she told me over the telephone. "I wish there was some way I could help, but we're so busy up here with the wedding arrangements. You're still coming, aren't you?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything," I told her truthfully. "I'll be there."

"I hope you find a new nurse before then," she told me.

Without an office assistant, there were a great many routine chores I had to do myself. One of them was the banking, and that Monday's mail had brought a gratifying number of checks in response to the monthly billings I'd sent out the week before. I wanted to deposit them in the bank at once so I'd have enough money for the rent on my office and my apartment, as well as the first month's salary for a new nurse, if I ever found one.

My office in a wing of Pilgrim Memorial Hospital was a short distance from town, but with no one to answer the phone I couldn't allow myself the luxury of the brisk walk to the bank I enjoyed so much. I drove the red Mercedes—my only extravagance—into Northmont and parked across the street from the Farmers & Merchants Bank.

"Hello, Doc. How's the car runnin'?"

I had been getting out of the car and recognized the raspy voice of Sheriff Lens even before I turned around. I turned to greet him. He'd been putting on a bit of weight lately, probably the result of his wife's good cooking, and I patted his middle as he came up to me. "You've got to take that off, Sheriff. Bad for the heart."

"I know, Doc. Have you found a nurse yet?"

I shook my head. "I ran an ad in the Boston, Hartford, and Prov-

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idence papers yesterday, but it's tough getting anyone with medical experience to move to a place like Northmont."

"Where you headin' for now?"

"I've got some checks to deposit at the—"

I was interrupted by a speeding black roadster that came up behind us and then cut over to the wrong side of the street to pull up in front of the bank. We saw two men run out of the bank. They were dressed like bankers, in dark suits and fedoras, but their features were covered by white handkerchiefs. The one in the lead carried a sawed-off shotgun—the other had a pistol and a money sack.

"I'll be damned," Sheriff Lens rasped, reaching for his gun.

The driver of the roadster slid across the seat to let the others in the driver's side, and I saw a flash of long blond hair. The man with the money spotted us and saw the revolver coming up in the sheriff's hand. He fired a wild shot in our direction—not close, but enough to throw off the sheriff's return shot. His bullet went wild as the car pulled away from the curb. "After them, Doc! It's a bank robbery!" he cried.

Without thinking, I took off in pursuit, with Sheriff Lens clinging to the running board. "I can only see part of the license number —8M5. The rest is mud!" he shouted. The roadster made a sudden left turn and was out of sight. I followed in time to see it turning left again at the next corner. "Step on it, Sam—I want to get a shot at them!" I reached the corner and started to turn when a Ford touring car suddenly appeared, coming toward me. I slammed on my brakes, stopping just inches short of a collision. *"Damn!"* Sheriff Lens was off and running, his gun held high.

The driver of the touring car, a young woman, saw him and let out a scream, apparently afraid the weapon was meant for her. I hurried over to reassure her.

"The sheriff's after some bank robbers. They just passed you." I pointed off after them.

"Oh!" She put her hands to her mouth. "I came this way for some peace and quiet!"

Sheriff Lens came back, looking dejected. "No sign of 'em, Doc. They must have made another turn and there's no one down the block to give chase. Come on, we'd better get back to the bank."

"Sorry about the excitement," I told the young woman.

"Did you see the passengers in that car?" the sheriff asked her.

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"Just a glimpse. I—"

"You'd better come with us. I'll want a statement from you."

"Come with you where?"

"Follow us to the bank," I explained. "It's just around the corner."

Some others along Main Street had seen the escape and had ventured close to the bank, but no one had dared enter the building. "It's awfully quiet in there," Seth Simpkins remarked. He owned the tailor shop across the street. "Do you think they're all dead?"

"We'll find out." Sheriff Lens pushed open the front door, his revolver still drawn.

The first we saw was Brewster Cartright, the bank manager, stretched out on the floor in a pool of blood. It's true, I remember thinking. They're all dead.

But Cartright proved to be the only one dead. The other four bank employees were found handcuffed together and locked in a back room.

The sheriff's key didn't fit the cuffs, so he went for a hacksaw while I checked them for injuries. "Tell me what happened," I asked Greenleaf, the assistant manager.

"It was terrible. They came in wearing those handkerchiefs over their faces and waving those guns. Right away I thought of Dillinger and all the bank robberies in the papers. I never thought it could happen here in Northmont."

"What happened to Cartright?"

"The one with the shotgun came in first—by the front door—and shouted that it was a holdup. The tellers were all behind their windows, getting ready for the noon customers. Mr. Cartright was up front by his desk. He was sneaking up behind the gunman when the second one came through the door and shot him dead. No one resisted after that. We thought they'd kill us all."

"How much money did they get?"

"I don't know. They handcuffed us and locked us in the back room before they went after the money. They warned us to keep quiet or they'd shoot us, too."

I knew each of the three tellers—Magneson, Jones, and Ryder—through doing business at the bank. Female tellers were unheard of in those days, but it was a respectable if low-paying job for young men just out of school. "Did you recognize either of the two men as regular customers?" I asked them.

Magneson shook his head. He was a curly-haired young man in

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his early twenties. "It was hard to tell with those handkerchiefs over their faces. But the voices weren't familiar."

Sheriff Lens returned with a hacksaw and a bunch of keys. On the third try, one of the keys worked and the men were freed—rubbing their wrists and looking grateful. "Poor Mr. Cartright," Greenleaf muttered. "He was a good man. He deserved a better end than this."

At this point, word of the shooting and robbery had reached the Cartright home and Brewster's wife Lydia arrived, her face streaked with tears. I'd treated Lydia Cartright for the flu the previous winter and felt I knew her better than I'd ever known her husband. "Lydia," I intercepted. "Let me take you home."

"Dr. Sam, I heard the news and I had to come. My place is here with him."

"You can't do any good here, Lydia."

"Sam, he meant everything to me—he can't just be gone so quickly!"

"Come on, I'll drive you home."

But out on the sidewalk, before I could reach the car, her brother came running up. "Lydia—I just heard!" Hank Foxe was a gangling young man still in his mid-twenties, some ten years younger than his sister. He'd worked at the bank himself a few years back, but apparently had decided the job seemed too much like charity from his sister and brother-in-law and was now employed by Northmont's first automobile dealer, who had set up shop a few blocks from the town square on Boston Street.

"Hank, he's dead."

Foxe looked at me for confirmation and I nodded. "Bank robbers shot him," I confirmed. "It was quick. He didn't suffer."

"God!" He cradled his sister in his arms and led her gently away.

"Do you still need me?" a voice behind me asked. I turned to see the young woman who'd been driving the Ford touring car.

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "I guess the sheriff and I forgot about you. The bank manager was killed by the bandits."

"How awful," she said.

I had an opportunity to study her for the first time. She was, I thought, in her late twenties. She had bobbed hair like many of the city girls were wearing—a sort of dirty blonde in color. "Things were so rushed I didn't get your name," I said.

"It's Mary Best. I was just driving through town on my way to Springfield. I've got a job waiting for me there."

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"Doc!" Sheriff Lens called from the doorway of the bank. "Can you come back in here for a minute?"

"Don't go away," I told Mary Best. "Your description of the men might be extremely valuable."

"But I didn't really see—"

The sheriff led me over to the body. "Can you do the formalities so we can get him out of here?"

"Certainly." I glanced up to make sure one of his deputies was taking notes. "The deceased is known to me as Brewster Cartright, manager of the Farmers & Merchants Bank of Northmont. He was pronounced dead at—" I glanced at my watch "—twelve-eight P.M., death having been caused by a bullet wound in the chest near the heart. The exit wound indicates the bullet passed through or near the heart, then out the back. Death was instantaneous."

Sheriff Lens nodded at me, his eyes watering as they sometimes did, and he signaled to a pair of ambulance attendants to come and take the body away. I reminded him of the young woman waiting outside. "Are you going to question her?" I asked him.

"Yes, I have to get her name and address. Bank robbery is a federal crime. We'll have the F.B.I. in here before dark. They'll want to talk with her, too. I've already called the state police to set up roadblocks."

"The driver could have been a woman. I saw a flash of long blond hair."

"I saw it, too," Mary confirmed, and I realized she had followed me into the bank. "But I didn't see any of their faces. They went by too fast."

"You should wait outside, Miss," Sheriff Lens suggested, trying to block her view of the body as it was placed on the stretcher.

"It's all right," she said. "I'm a nurse."

"You *are?*" My face must have registered my surprise. "I've been advertising for a nurse to work in my office."

She gave me a smile. "I already have a job waiting for me in Springfield."

"What will your address be there, Miss—?" the sheriff asked.

"Best. I don't have a place to live yet, but you can reach me through Springfield General Hospital." She turned back to me. "I gather you're a doctor. You pronounced him dead."

"Forgive me for not introducing myself. I'm Dr. Sam Hawthorne. I've had a private practice here for thirteen years."

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"You must have started when you were a child."

"Almost." I smiled, basking in her compliment.

The telephone rang and Greenleaf, the assistant manager, answered it. "The state police want you, Sheriff," he said, handing over the phone.

"Sheriff Lens," the sheriff said. Then, "What? —Hell, they must have gone somewhere!"

"No sign of them?" I asked when he'd hung up.

"Not a trace. They had all four crossroads covered within minutes of my call and no car of that description went through."

"That just means they're still in the township. There are still plenty of back roads and farmers' barns where they could be hiding."

"It also means that we've got 'em trapped," Sheriff Lens said with a determined smile. "It's only a matter of time."

The agent in charge of the F.B.I. office for our region was named Clint Walling. He was a tall, slim man about my age, wearing a suit and a soft grey fedora that stood out in a town like Northmont. He arrived about midafternoon and drove directly to the bank, where Sheriff Lens was just winding up his investigation. I'd gone off to check on a patient at the hospital but had returned in time to meet him. "What have we here?" he asked after shaking hands. "Bank robbery and murder?"

He stared at the bloodstain on the floor. "You put out an alarm, of course."

"The state police had the roads blocked within minutes, but there's been no sign of the car. Either they managed to slip through or they're still around town."

"Did they leave behind any physical evidence?" Walling asked, producing a pipe which he began filling with tobacco.

"Only those handcuffs on the counter."

The F.B.I. agent grunted as he studied them. "The sort police use, but they can be bought almost anywhere."

"One of my keys unlocked them," the sheriff told him.

"Let's take a look at that back room." Walling followed Sheriff Lens into the storeroom and I tagged along. The back door was metal and bolted top and bottom. He asked the sheriff where it led.

"To Maple Street. It runs behind the bank."

"So they could have gotten out this way."

"The tellers couldn't. They were handcuffed together, and one was cuffed to a leg of this desk. The robbers left by the front door—they

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had a car waitin'. Doc and I seen it drive up as they came runnin' out."

Walling took a long drag on his pipe. "How much money did they get?"

"The head teller says almost forty thousand dollars."

"Nice haul for a few minutes' work." He made some notes. "I'll have another agent joining me in the morning. We usually work in teams. I'll want to interview the employees and any other witnesses."

"You can begin with us," I suggested. "The sheriff and I saw the getaway." I ran through the story.

"What about this woman in the other car?"

"She's been waiting at the lunch counter across the street," the sheriff told him, "along with the bank employees. Doc, go get them for us, will you?"

I found them clustered around a table, talking over the robbery and killing with Simpkins, the tailor. Old Seth never worried about business when something exciting happened, and I knew without looking that I'd find an Out To Lunch sign on his shop door. "The F.B.I. man is over there," I announced. "He wants to see you all."

We trooped back across the street, with Seth tagging along. When Mary Best and the bank employees had been introduced to Clint Walling, Simpkins chimed in, "I was the first one on the scene after the holdup. I saw the whole thing from my tailor shop. I came across the street after Sheriff Lens and Doc Hawthorne took off after them, but I was afraid to come in the bank. I thought maybe they were all dead."

Walling turned back to Sheriff Lens. "How many shots were fired in all?"

"Mr. Cartright was killed by a single bullet," Greenleaf interrupted. "That was the only shot fired in the bank. But after we were locked up, we heard more shots from the street."

"The one with the pistol fired at me and I shot back," Sheriff Lens explained. "We both missed. Before I could get off another shot, this gal cut in front of us."

Walling shifted his attention once again, after setting his pipe down in the ashtray. "Miss Best?"

"I was driving to Springfield to take a job as a nurse. I detoured this way to see a little of the countryside. Somehow I was on that back street—Maple Street—approaching the intersection when this black roadster came screeching around the corner with three people

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in the front seat. It came toward my side of the street, then it swerved away."

"Could you describe any of the men?"

"No. I don't even remember if they were still masked or not. They might have been. One had long blond hair and could have been a woman."

"The driver?"

"No, not the driver—the passenger on the right-hand side."

"That's correct," I said. "He—or she—slid over from behind the wheel so the other two could get in. The one with the pistol was last in and took the wheel."

Walling nodded wearily. "I want to get straight in my mind exactly what happened inside the bank. Can one of you take the part of the dead man and show me where he was standing? I'll need two more for the robbers."

Greenleaf, the assistant manager, stepped forward. "I saw the whole thing. Ryder, you be the first bandit and come in the door as if you're holding a shotgun."

Embarrassed, the young teller followed instructions. Magneson, the head teller, was recruited for the part of the manager, moving out of his office behind the first bandit as if to grab him. Then Greenleaf, playing the second bank robber, came through the doorway and pantomimed shooting the manager in the back.

The F.B.I. had them go through the handcuffing and locking in the back room. "There were no other customers in all this time?" he asked.

"Our big rush comes at noon," the head teller explained. "This was about ten minutes before twelve. But the one with the shotgun kept the door covered all the time."

"That's the right time," I confirmed. "When we got back here and I pronounced Cartright dead, it was eight minutes after twelve. We'd already been here a few minutes. The robbery had to have happened between quarter and ten to twelve."

"Where was the money taken from?" Walling asked the assistant manager.

"These cash drawers were all open, as well as the drawers in this little storage safe. If they got just that, it's forty thousand. Of course, we'll have to check further to see if anything else is missing."

"Sounds like one of them midwestern bank robbin' gangs, don't it?" Sheriff Lens asked the federal man.

"Most of them are dead now," Clint Walling pointed out. "Just

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last year Bonnie and Clyde were killed by a posse in Louisiana, and the F.B.I. shot Dillinger outside a theater in Chicago—"

"Some say it wasn't Dillinger at all," Seth Simpkins interrupted.

Walling ignored him. "We got Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson last fall. That's pretty much the end of the big-time bank robbers, we think."

"There are always people ready to imitate them," I observed.

Walling nodded. "It seems they knew the bank would probably be empty just before noon. Have you noticed any stranger hanging around lately, Mr. Greenleaf?"

"No."

"A man came in yesterday to change a fifty-dollar bill," Ryder volunteered. "I don't remember seeing him before."

"Could he have been one of the men today?"

The teller looked at the F.B.I. man, alarmed. "Could have been, I suppose."

"Do you need me any longer?" Mary Best asked. "I really must be on my way to Springfield."

Walling eyed her for a moment and then said, "I'd like you to stay around a while longer, Miss."

"What for?"

"You're a possible material witness."

"But I saw nothing!"

I sensed her rising anger. "Let's go outside," I suggested.

Outside the bank, she said, "He suspects me, doesn't he?"

"Of what?"

"Of being in league with the bank robbers. He thinks I was stationed at that intersection to block off any pursuing cars. That's what I did with you and the sheriff!"

"Oh, I don't know about that." The thought hadn't occurred to me, but I couldn't be sure what Clint Walling might be thinking.

A fancy yellow convertible pulled up and I recognized Hank Foxe, Lydia Cartright's brother, behind the wheel. "How's Lydia taking it?" I asked him as he peered at the bank, the motor of the car still running.

"Not good," he said. "I'm on my way to Brewster's to make the funeral arrangements now. The family's with her."

I remembered Mary at my side. "This is Mary Best, one of the witnesses. Hank's sister is the wife of the man who was killed."

"I'm terribly sorry," she told him.

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"Had your brother-in-law mentioned anything about strangers hanging around the bank?" I asked Hank.

"Not that I know of. Confidentially, Doc, they may not have been strangers."

"What do you mean?"

Hank Foxe, with his know-it-all attitude I'd always disliked, pressed on. "You know how bankers make enemies. I saw that tailor—Simpkins—hanging around in there. He had a little house and garage around the corner on Maple Street the bank foreclosed on last month. Now the house is standing empty and Simpkins has to live with his daughter. He was cursing Brewster every chance he got."

The notion was so bizarre I had to laugh. "If you think Seth Simpkins is in league with bank robbers, you need to have your head examined, Hank. The man's a tailor, not a thief."

"This here Depression's making thieves of us all, Doc. People will do most anything to put a decent meal on the table."

"You seem to be doing all right." I patted the fender of the yellow convertible. "This another new car?"

My question seemed to embarrass him. "I got it off the lot," he mumbled. "It's good publicity to drive 'em around town, show people what we got to offer."

He started to pull away and then paused to back up. "Doc, if you get a chance you might take a ride out and see my sister. I think she could use something to calm her nerves and help her get a good night's sleep."

"I'll do that," I assured him.

We watched him drive away and went back inside the bank. Sheriff Lens had just completed another call to the state police. "Still no sign of the black roadster," he told us. "They've got a man on his way here with a report."

Sergeant Mullens, a trooper I knew slightly, was a ruddy-faced young man who seemed nervous in the presence of an F.B.I. agent. "We've gone over every mile of road in the county," he told the sheriff. "There's no sign of that roadster."

"Nothing went through your roadblocks?"

"Nothing of that description. The closest thing to it was a red roadster with some college kids."

"How about a large truck of some kind—a moving van?" I asked.

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The sheriff's face brightened. "You think they drove the car inside it?"

"It's worth considering."

Mullens gave us a slightly superior smile. "We learned that trick back in Prohibition days. We check the inside of all trucks in a roadblock."

Walling wasn't impressed. "There are still plenty of places to hide a car. And there's always the possibility they got through a checkpoint before your roadblock was in place."

"I doubt that, sir," Mullens answered.

Greenleaf and the tellers were growing restless after nearly four hours of questioning. "Can we go home to our families now?" he asked.

Walling nodded. "I suppose so. Do you have any better idea about how much was stolen?"

The head teller looked up from his books. "Our first estimate was pretty close. It looks like forty-two thousand, more or less."

"All right. When my partner gets here in the morning we'll want individual statements from each of you. That's all for now."

"Will we be able to reopen the bank in the morning?" Greenleaf asked.

"That will be up to your directors. We have no objection."

Outside again, I led Mary to my car. "Wait a minute, Dr. Hawthorne—I'm on my way to Springfield, remember?"

"I thought you might come with me to visit Mrs. Cartright. She might need the comfort of another woman."

"I'm hours late already!"

"Then another hour won't matter," I suggested with a grin.

She smiled wearily and climbed into the front seat of my Mercedes. "Why am I doing this?"

"Because you're a good person, and a good nurse."

"With a good job waiting in Springfield."

I circled the block as the bank robbers had done, turning onto Maple Street. Except for the tailor's empty house, there were mainly the back ends of buildings fronting on Main Street, across from vacant lots where the town hoped one day to build a new school. I turned right at the next intersection, following the route the escaping bank robbers must have taken. Now I was on Boston Street, and before long I came to the auto dealership where Hank Foxe worked. I glanced over the lot for the yellow convertible he'd been driving,

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but there was no sign of it. Perhaps he'd gone back to his sister's house.

"Weren't you able to get the license number of the getaway car?" Mary asked.

"Sheriff Lens got the beginning of it—8M5—but there was some convenient mud over the rest. The car was probably stolen, anyway."

"The sheriff sounded as if you've helped him before."

"A few times," I admitted.

I pulled in before the large white house where Brewster Cartright had lived. There was no sign of Hank Foxe, but Lydia Cartright met us at the door. She'd changed to a black dress with a single strand of pearls, and her eyes were puffy from crying. "Thank you for coming, Dr. Sam."

"It's no trouble. Let me leave you a powder to help you sleep."

"That will be a blessing." She stared at Mary as if trying to place her.

"Mary's a nurse who's helping me out," I said.

"Have the police caught the killers yet?"

"No, but it's only a matter of time," I assured her.

"I won't rest until they're behind bars. Could they still be in the area?"

"It's a possibility," I told her. I comforted her as best I could, and Mary's soothing words helped her, I could tell.

When we finally left, it was nearly five o'clock. "Is there still time for you to get to Springfield?" I asked her.

"I've probably lost the job already. Is there a place in town where I could stay overnight? Then I can phone them and see where I stand."

I drove her to the Northmont Inn, which was as good a place as any. Then I went over to see Sheriff Lens at his office. Groups of people were still clustered in the street near the bank, discussing the day's tragedy in grim and hushed voices. Some worried about their money on deposit at the bank, others speculated that the bandits had been masterminded by an undead John Dillinger.

The sheriff was depressed by the whole thing. "Damn it, Doc, that F.B.I. guy as much as called me incompetent. He says that's why there are so many small-town bank robberies these days—because the small-town lawmen are incompetent. Do I have to take that from him?"

"Calm down, Sheriff. He won't think you're so incompetent when you solve this case."

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"How'm I gonna do that?"

"I've got an idea where that black roadster might be hidden. It would explain why it never left town."

"What are you talkin' about, Doc?"

"Come with me. But first I want to stop at the inn and pick up that nurse, Mary Best. She saw the car head-on—she may be able to help identify it."

The sheriff grinned at me. "You sure that's not just an excuse to see her, Doc? I think you're a little sweet on her."

"Come on, you old rascal," I said, "or I'll leave you at the mercy of the G-men."

After she joined us in the car, I told Mary, "This may be the climax of the investigation. I thought you'd want to see it, and maybe help identify the roadster."

"You mean you've found it?"

"Not exactly, but I think I know where it is."

"Tell me!" she begged, her clear hazel eyes turned toward us both.

"You'll see in a few minutes." I steered the car around the town square, the three of us crowded into the wide front seat. "In one of Chesterton's stories, he has Father Brown ask the question, 'Where does a wise man hide a pebble?' The answer is on the beach. 'Where does a wise man hide a leaf?' Father Brown asks, too, and this time the answer is in the forest."

I pulled into the auto dealer's lot and saw Hank Foxe come outside to greet us. "Hi, there! What can I do for you, Sam? Sheriff Lens?"

"Where do you hide a black roadster, Hank? On a used-car lot?"

"Huh?" He stared at me, looking blank.

"You were driving that getaway car, Hank, wearing a blond wig. You got it off this lot. After the robbery, you drove back here, let your partners out, and parked the car in line with the others. Maybe you even painted a price on its front windshield."

"That's crazy, Sam. You think I'd put Brew in danger?"

"Is the car here, Doc?" the sheriff asked.

I let my eyes wander over the lot. I thought I'd seen one when we passed earlier and now I saw it again, in a back row. A black roadster of the same make the bank robbers had used. "There it is." I pointed.

"I'll get the keys and prove to you it couldn't have been used in the robbery," Foxe insisted. He ran into the showroom and returned in a moment with a ring of labeled keys. He tried to start the car,

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but the engine wouldn't turn over. "See? No gas—we keep them empty so they're harder to steal at night."

"You'd have had plenty of time to siphon the gasoline out of it," I countered.

Mary had gone around to look at the front of the car. "You'd better look at this," she said to me.

"What's that?"

"There's an American Automobile Association medallion attached to the radiator grille. The car that almost hit me didn't have anything on the grille."

"You see?" Foxe said triumphantly.

Mentally, I must have withdrawn from the case on the spot. I went home alone to my apartment and tried to forget all about it, immersing myself instead in the latest medical journals. In the morning, I was making breakfast when my bell rang. I answered the door and found Mary Best standing there.

"I'm leaving now," she said. "I stopped by to say goodbye. I enjoyed meeting you yesterday, if not the circumstances."

"Come in. I'm just having coffee."

I poured her a cup and she sat down across the table from me. "I had another reason for coming. There's something I think you might have overlooked yesterday. I couldn't leave without telling you."

"What's that?"

"Well, you see—"

She talked for some time and she made sense.

"It should be easy enough to prove," I said. "The car should still be there."

"It *is* still there. I looked."

"You *looked?*"

"Of course—I had to be sure I was right."

"Come on!"

We picked up Sheriff Lens on the way and reached the bank just as Clint Walling and his partner were entering the bank. Greenleaf seemed surprised to see us. "We're just opening for business."

"You'll have to close again," I said, keeping an eye on the three tellers.

"Why? There's enough money."

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"But no employees. Special Agent Walling here is about to arrest all four of you for bank robbery and murder."

Clint Walling's mouth dropped open, and behind the tellers' cages Jones went for a gun, but then thought better of it. Walling's partner had already drawn his revolver and Sheriff Lens had his weapon out.

"Suppose somebody explains what's going on," Walling suggested.

"Do you want the honors?" I asked Mary.

"No, you go ahead," she said. "You worked out the details."

"Mary noticed something very elementary yesterday which escaped me completely," I began. "When I examined the body of Brewster Cartright, I observed that the bullet entered his chest near the heart and came out the back. Yet when Greenleaf and the others reenacted the killing, they had the robber shooting Cartright in the back. They lied about the circumstances of the robbery. As soon as Mary pointed that out to me, I began to remember other things. My first impression as they ran out of the building was that the robbers were dressed like bankers. That's because they *were* bankers. One of them had left earlier to get the car, wearing a blond wig to confuse witnesses. He pulled up and the other two jumped in. They weren't carrying the real money—it had been removed from the bank and hidden earlier."

"But you found them handcuffed together in the storeroom," Walling reminded me. "How did they get there?"

"Mary pointed out to me that the gang's car, in front of the bank on the wrong side of the street, turned left at the first intersection and then left again before disappearing. That put it on Maple Street, right behind the bank. The storeroom has a bolted door leading to Maple Street. The fourth bank employee, probably Greenleaf here, stayed in the bank and they locked him in the storeroom. If witnesses had run into the bank at once, Greenleaf could have talked to them through the locked door, delaying the rescue long enough for the others to return through the back door, bolt it, and handcuff themselves together. Also, of course, he was there to unbolt the door and let them in."

"But what happened to the car?" Walling wanted to know.

"Mary thought it swerved as it rounded the corner into Maple Street, as if heading toward her side of the street. What's there on Maple besides the backs of all these buildings? The house and garage where Seth Simpkins lived until the bank foreclosed on him. The

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empty house, which means the bank had keys to it. The missing roadster is in that garage, and has been since the robbery."

"Are you sure?" the agent asked.

"I looked during the night," Mary told him. "Through a window."

The F.B.I. man shook his head. "How could they pull a trick like that in broad daylight without being seen?"

"There are just vacant lots across the street, and mostly the backs of buildings. Mary's car was on the street, of course, but luckily for them she kept going around the corner. If anyone else had been in sight I suppose they'd have circled a few blocks and come back—or perhaps dropped two of the tellers off while the third drove the car far enough away to abandon it. In that case, Greenleaf could have claimed the missing teller was out to lunch during the robbery."

"Are any of you ready to talk?" Walling asked.

It was Greenleaf who finally broke the silence. "We were short in some accounts," he said quietly. "Cartright gave us until yesterday to put back the money. He was going to call the sheriff. That's when we killed him and faked the bank robbery."

"*You* killed him," Ryder said. "It was all your idea."

Walking Mary to her car, I congratulated her. "We'd make a great team here, healing the sick, solving mysteries. I wish you'd think about it."

"That was my one and only try at mystery-solving." She slid behind the wheel of her car, giving me a thoughtful look. "Well, I'm off to Springfield."

"Good luck, Mary."

She drove off and I watched her go. I was still watching when the touring car made a U-turn and headed back to me.

She leaned out of the window and asked, "How much did you say the job pays?"

"And that was how Mary Best came to be my nurse," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "With her arrival, life was never quite the same for me, as you'll hear next time, when I tell you about some bizarre events that happened at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital."

"Q"

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READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls," Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publictions. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MAKING EXTRA MONEY MADE EASY. FREE Subscription to Opportunity Magazine offers hundreds of proven ways. Write: Opportunity, Dept. M25, 6 N. Michigan, Chicago, IL 60602.

NO MORE JOB—$125,000—you could do better! No Gimmicks, Gadgets or B/S. PROVEN step by step. See how I'm doing it, part time. YOU could be next $6.95. IPC, 11765 W. Ave. S-115IO, San Antonio, Texas 78216.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

EARN $1000 weekly stuffing envelopes at home. Free supplies. Send stamped addressed envelope. JuDeA Enterprise, 4822 Edgewater, Houston, Texas 77093.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 25¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

"JANITORIAL BUSINESS MONEYMAKING SECRETS." Free Report! Make $25,000-$100,000+ annually! MBM, Box 159D, Junction City, CA 96048.

HIGH Profits T-shirts, Caps, Inexpensive transfer machines, supplies Press, Box 22809(BC), Tampa, FL 33623.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

UNLIMITED EARNINGS! Sell simple information by mail. Free details. Prestige, 712 Belmont #IO9, Watertown, MA 02172.

How to win playing slot machines! Free information. Medusa, Dept. 32, 2817 Capitol, Des Moines, IA 50317.

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MAKE MONEY WITH GAMES! Send $1. for detailed brochure. C&A, Box 4539, San Clemente, CA 92672.

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SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity. Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

YOUR HOROSCOPE With Pages of explanations. Send Birth Date, Place, Time. $19.95: Tiger Lady, Box 2308, Dearborn MI 48123.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 811230084.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton, #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

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SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

BE PARTICULAR! Demand the very best! Get Exeter's PERSONALIZED, CONFIDENTIAL GUARANTEED INTRODUCTIONS to COMPANIONSHIP, ROMANCE, FRIENDSHIP, more. FREE details. Exeter's, Attn: EQM, Box 2335, Bismarck, N.D. 58502.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Add that pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

FIND a Mate in '88. Listings $1. Friends, P.O. Box 31, Dept. 1, Rogersville, TN 37857.

CREATE A NEW IDENTITY. Confidential. Untraceable. SASE to: GSE, P.O. Box 25768, St. Louis, MO 63136.

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

SAVE Money on every long distance call. SASE: CFL, P.O. Box 946, Norristown, PA 19404.

ESTABLISH credit. Get credit cards, low-interest loans. Free details. Hartman, Dept. IO, Box 3794, Youngstown, Ohio 44512.

PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING

FREE FILM 250 rolls Kodak Film. Any size, any exposure. FREE details. Omega Enterprises, 448 N. 39th St., Dept. 4, Milwaukee, WI 53208.

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RENAULT Advertising Specialties. Top Commissions Bonus Incentives. Service All Areas. P.O. Box 535, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971.

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TAPES AND CASSETES

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Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $_____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 = 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # = 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York = 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words.) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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10 *NEW* stories—including

MICHAEL GILBERT (last of the series about Jonas Pickett)

JAMES POWELL (about a town named Deer Xing)

DOUG ALLYN (about redneck saloon society)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Rand and the Guy Fawkes bombing)

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Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 871 Janette Ave., Windsor, Ontario N9C 321. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

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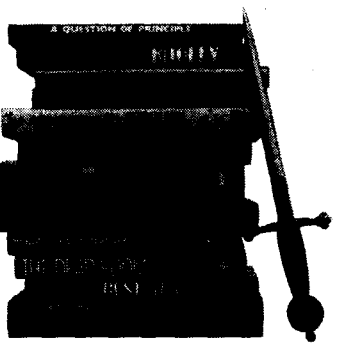

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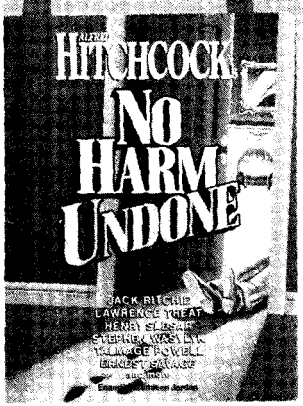

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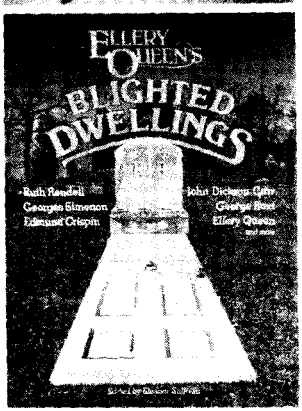

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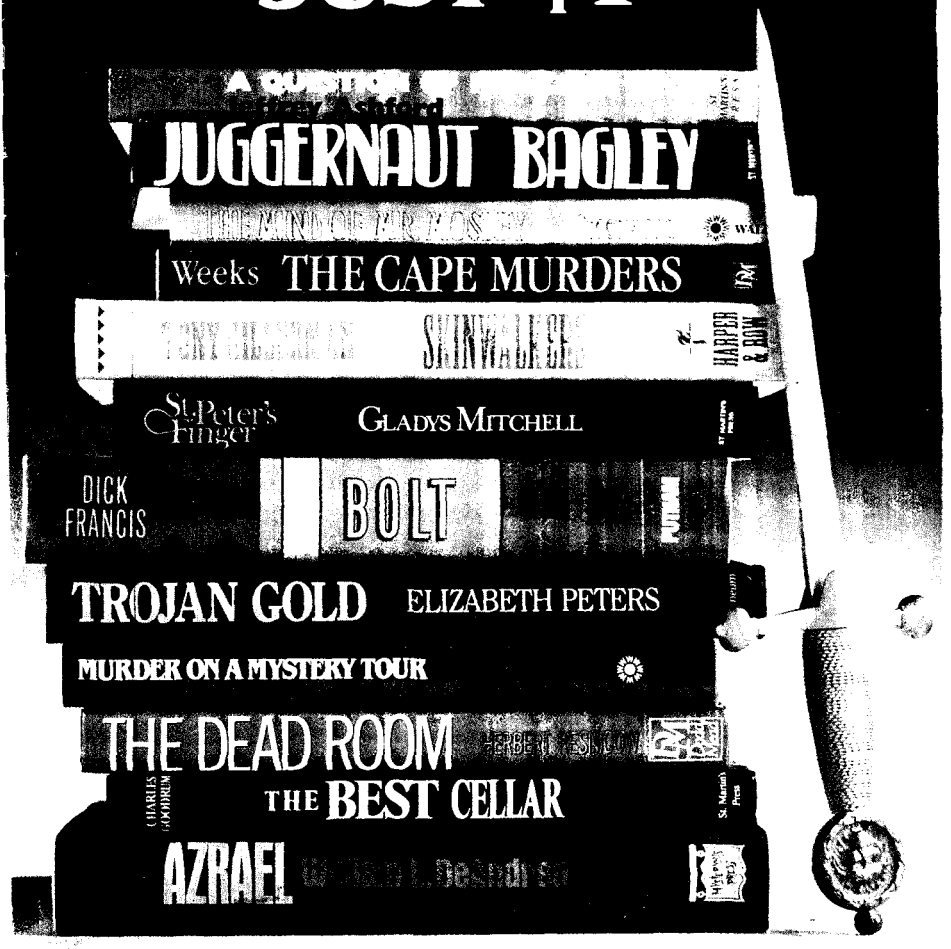

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